

Cultural anthropology relates taboo principally to religion, whose negative political function is to prohibit, forbid, "bind against" (Latin, *re-LIG-io-n*). One implication is that separating politics and religion is (however expedient) scientific nonsense, a nonsense practiced in the American public-school system in overreading "the separation of church & state" to mean the separating of religion & government training of the citizenry....Another political bearing of taboo is the fact that however strongly an action may be "indicated" rationally, some proposals won't be proposed in Congress for the simple reason that it would be politically suicidal to do so. Some proposals would enrage the generality of our populace, and some some single-issue voting blocs, and some some ethnic groupings, and some some religious groupings. Elected public officials who intend reelection are sharply aware of walking a minefield of taboos--but ironically, the ungenerous public, in noting officials' irrational divagations, fails to identify its taboos as the cause. My proposals for reducing the force of the taboo factor in politics are these: (1) A potential 8-year-term for President, with the British system of challenge, no reelection; (2) A potential 10-year-term for members of Congress, no reelection; (3) A potential 12-year-term for Supreme Court justices, no continuance....It's logical that the leaders most affected by their followers' taboos (and their own internalized taboos) are the leaders in the field that is a society's primary taboos-guardian, viz. religion. It follows that religion's leaders' behavior will appear to be least logical and most gutless (wimps, nerds) or, by the principle of psychodynamic reversal, most dangerous (eg, People of the Am. Way's nightmare about the Religious Right, esp. Tel-evangelists). It follows that a damn-the-taboos religious leader will eventually, after having offended-disappointed everybody, have no followers--eg, Jesus, who paradoxically (therefore?) gets presented as the ideal religious leader. As Wife Loree likes to say, "It's complicated."....Rhetoric is the study & practice of taboo birthing, caring, feeding, & attacking-replacing. As the populace, including most leaders, live by slogans enshrining taboos rather than by ideas (which perpetually turn the mind critically back to square one), cheap rhetoric specializes in slogan-manipulation, at the price that the slogans become (in the populace, and by self-deception in the "mind" of the speechifiers) confused with convictions--with the further price that an attack on a slogan is experienced as (1) an attack on a conviction and therefore on its holder, and (2) an attack on religion, whose temple the slogan is & in which the taboo functions as idol. Ron. Reagan's rhetoric, in its often weird distance from reality, exhibits time & again this syndrome confusing religion & politics, & convictions & slogans. But I am, professionally & personally, more concerned with and about the pathology & mendacity of the utterances of religious leaders, who should be honored & trusted to the degree that they are worthy of honor & trust (but are usu. trusted both more & less).... Rationalists utopianly imagine the world would be better off without taboos, but that only points to rationalism's taboo against the irrational-esthetic-mystical dimension. Taboo, always & everywhere, is a community's sociodynamic of negative self-definition. The pertinent humanizing project is to refine taboo critically: "critical taboo" is not an oxymoron. It is (finally we got to it!) the project of this Thinksheet, whose form is an abecedary: using this artifice, I'm illustrating (1) how unequal the battle of reason against humanity-impeding taboos, the latter controlling more emotion-buttons; (2) the power of the "liberal," pro-individual paradigm vis-a-vis taboos in movements & institutions; and (3) the intra- & inter-communal instability, changefulness, of power relations among taboos...As Dr. Ruth's tele-sex trailer says, "The opinions expressed on this program are Dr. Ruth's & do not necessarily correspond with those of other experts in the field." Ditto for Dr. Elliott (sensuality & spirituality being humanity's elliptical foci, so the most taboo-freighted, so the most opinion-variegated). For best effect in the light of this Thinksheet's purpose, I state baldly some convictions (taboos? prejudices? opinions? conclusions?) of my own. Another way to put the same fact is that there are good & bad taboos, and I'll tell you which is which if you hold still. ...No, I didn't use all the letters: I don't feel the need to be compulsive about thatonly the need to fill, compulsively, both sides of this sheet.

ABORTION There I went & hit the jackpot on the first try! In present public discourse, this issue has the lowest % of reason. Child-bearing must,

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as humanity's threat to the biosphere increases both in reality and in public awareness, be reconceived, revisioned, from right to permission, with abortion mandatory in the case of all fetuses not government-approved.

BIBLICAL RELIGION is taboo in our public schools. The secularistic public-school establishment, as reflected in textbooks & curricula, is virulently anti-biblical, parallel with its being anthropocentric (human-potential).

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT is a close 2nd to abortion for low % of reason, though recent Supreme Court decisions (2 in Apr/87, when I'm writing this) have a higher rational component. NOTE: (1) You're more apt to be sentenced for murdering a white than a black, but if you're white you're 1/3rd more apt to be executed than if you're black (U.S.Dept.Justice stats)...(2) Drugs destroy minds, lives, societies, but are not considered serious enough to execute drug-pushers, even those at the multimillion-\$ level....(3) Compulsive rapists are regularly released by parole boards under pressure to make room for recidivists & newly sentenced prisoners. Eg, in '86 Texas released 30,000 prisoners, one who'd been sentenced to 123 years & got out after 8 & continued his compulsive mayhem against women (raping & slashing & choking)--a social insanity Texas didn't have when by executions its prison population was thinned down to the size of its prisons. In New York & some other states, the prison population keeps outrunning prison-building, with no relief in sight. As a judge, my father gave major time to increasing the quality of parole officers--but to what point if what determines release is not the careful work of parole officers but the mere arithmetic need to move prisoners out the back door to make room for those coming in the front? Criminal-oriented talk of "justice" needs to be balanced by victim-oriented talk of "justice": what, eg, would the string of women attacked by that releasee have to say about justice?....(4) "The right to life" is--along with the rights to liberty & the pursuit of happiness (and, in the original version of the Declar.Inded., property)--a qualified right (in the cases of the fetus, criminality, war, & "heroic measures" triage). But as a taboo, it's an absolute right, of pernicious social effects; and it idolatrously elevates human dignity to the level of sacrality....Answering the abstract claim that the destruction of any human life is a threat to all human life is the concrete fact that the continued existence of some human life--viz. certain categories of criminality--is a threat to the continued existence of some other, and innocent, human life. The notion that the former should cancel the latter is unbiblical, insane, liberal, & inhuman. The simplistic utopianism & humanistic idolatry of that notion reminds me of this from H.L.Mencken: "For every complex problem, there is a simple answer, and it is wrong."

GENOCIDE The continued existence of some folks is awkward to other folks, but that shouldn't be helped: no group should wipe out any other group--eg, as the Chinese wiped out their Christians in the 8th c., or as--in the 20th--the Turks tried to do the same to the Armenians & the Germans the Jews. But it's wrong to try to confine the Greek word "holocaust" to this last.

INCEST is, from every human angle, a good taboo, though it's being eroded along with other sexual taboos, such as rape & promiscuity (this last, however, startlingly crimped now by AIDS). As for rape, it seems that 28% of present college women will, sometime in their lives, be subjects of incompleting-or-completing rape--but society has been increasing the obstacles to the execution of rapists, & their escape encourages the rise of rape.

JEWS, JUDAISM Since Hitler, we've been living with a worrisome taboo against any criticism of Jews, Judaism, & Israel. The critic is immediately shot down as antisemitic (or antijewish). That can't be good news for Jews, or anybody else. Putting Jews in a special class of wounded isolates them & subtly makes them, sooner or later, targets of real Jew-haters. Ditto for Blacks. / (See also #1234, "Tabu as change-enemy.")