

Enchantment: The Individual as A FALSE NUMINOUS

Enlightenment # 10008

Argumentation for/against particular political stances has been steadily shifting, 'round the world, from traditional Machiavellian/imperial/colonial to humane values. This is a rhetorical fact whether or not one considers we've made, thereby, an advance in humaneness. In this thinksheet I'm concerned about this: the shift has increased the rhetorical use of transhistorical-transhuman motives-sanctions, appeals to enchanted (numinous) realms-values. In consequence, we are becoming more aware of the use of the holy in political rhetoric, for its force has increased and its presence is becoming more visible. But here's the lag: most interpreters of political realities continue to argue in ignorance of this force and this presence.

ITEM: Equally, the sociopsychodynamic of the PLO and of Israel is religiopolitical, not just political or even mainly political. Reagan is supported by most well-known political commentators in assuming the humaneness of pressing for "a Palestinian homeland" on the ground that such would eliminate PLO violence. How simplistic! All true Muslims would agree with the five who assassinated Sadat at least in this, that (1) "democracy" does not exist in Quran, which (2) sees Islam as essentially expansionist--in light of which the problem is not that Palestinians do not have "a homeland" but that Israel as a state is illegitimately, even blasphemously, occupying (the (Islamic) homeland." We mired ourselves in Vietnam partly because of a mushy sentimentality leveled by Cardinal Spellman with Tom-Dooley stories, and Washington's present mood vis-a-vis "the poor Palestinians" is frighteningly similar. Principle: When the numinous is not factored in, sentimentality functions disastrously in its place. The secular notion that every people needs a homeland (disproved by Judaism's flowering period) woodenly leaves out the enchantment factor out of the Semitic (Arab/Jew) past while layering atop the modern enchantments of "democracy" and "socialism" (=, added together, "liberationism").

ITEM: Barbara Walter's interview of Carter last week (Oct '82) makes even clearer the fact that Carter's enchantment with the individual citizen turned him into Iran's plaything for 444 days, during which (additional horror!) little else happened at the USA executive level. Carter said he told Khomeini he'd bomb Tehran if one hostage were killed: strange internal contradiction of respect/disrespect for human life! The alternative--viz., leaving the matter in UN hands (=, virtually, considering the hostages, dead)--would have seemed a crass violation of two convergent sentimentalities, Christian and Ren.-Enlt.

ITEM: The enchantment centering in "the individual" (an enchantment motored by these two convergent sentimentalities) corrupts not only foreign affairs but also domestic. My father, a compassionate judge, was horrified in his last years to see jurisprudence (as theory and as practice) slipping more and more from the rights of society to the rights of "the individual," meaning the individual criminal. As Carter was willing to victimize thousands of Tehranans in retaliation for the death of one hostage, our current law-functioning terrorizes and victimizes millions (in '82, 30% of Am. homes violated!) in the interest of protecting criminals from imprisonment and legal death (capital punishment). We are deporting criminals into society instead of liberating society from them. Humane values? I argue for a humane society: our society is becoming less human, paradoxically, as "the individual" is given "more humane treatment." Will the myths of our enchantment with a false numinous (viz., "the individual") yield in time to save us? Will we liberals produce enough fresh thinking to save us (i.e., to keep Am. from sliding into rightist tyranny? - OCT '82