

THOUGHTS ON SEX, TRANSCENDENCE, AND WAR

Edward D. Weinberger

Freud believed that sex was the Great Motivator, but any student of history knows otherwise: it is religion that really gets people up in the morning. In all of human history, only Helen of Troy – if she existed – was hot enough to cause a war¹, but religious wars fill the pages of every history book. Merely as examples, we have biblical descriptions of the various squabbles that the Israelites (a.k.a. God's Chosen People) had with their neighbors, as well as historical records of assorted Moslem jihads of the Middle Ages, the Crusades, and the Thirty Years' War. The twentieth century was dominated by wars of the "secular religions" of fascism and communism versus the secular religion of democracy. And, of course, we have the current scuffle between the Shiite and Sunni Moslems in Iraq.

So what is it that people find so compelling about breaking each other's heads in the name of God? I would argue that it is a hunger for a transcendent experience, and, furthermore, that transcendent experience is the deepest need in the human psyche.

This is the reason that, throughout the ages, people have sacrificed just about anything you can think of to realize the transcendent. Besides the obvious examples – the various fakirs and ascetics throughout history – we have explorers braving extreme cold and risking their lives to reach the North Pole; we have athletes gulping down steroids, at well known costs to their health, to break the home run record; we have post-doc's slaving away in a lab, 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, hoping for the thrill of discovery. The list is as varied as are moments in a life.

This is not to say that sex has no place in this. For most people, an orgasm is the closest they get to G-d. But it is not sex, *per se*, that gets us where we live, but the possibility of transcendence thru sex (If you don't believe me, think about the times when it was, well, just not so good. Surely that is not terribly motivational!).

Unfortunately, also included in this list are the extreme emotions of war. The build-up to the current Iraq war reminded me of the Marx Brothers movie, *Duck Soup*. As soon as Groucho, as President Firefly of Fredonia declares war on neighboring Sylvania, everybody starts marching around singing, with terrible Purpose, "To war, to war, it's off to war we go!" It seemed so grand! And as Fredonia plucks victory out of the jaws of defeat, the movie ends with the operatically trained Margaret Dumont, as Mrs. Gloria Teasdale, singing the proud anthem "Hail, hail Fredonia!"

On to the real-life invasion of Iraq. Can't you imagine that sense of glorious invincibility that our troops must have had on their way to "victory" in Iraq! They were on the march

¹ For that matter, the whole Helen of Troy business was supposedly started by a beauty contest among the gods, so even that example is suspect

for FREEDOM! Can't you imagine that how even the (relatively few) casualties (the "hallowed dead") reinforced the gravity of the enterprise?

Then there's the blood lust of battle itself. How much more exciting it must be to actually *fight* in a battle, rather than to just watch it in the movies (How many more movies have battle scenes than sex scenes?). Veterans spend the rest of their lives talking about the War. A staple of my TV diet as a child of the '50's was the show *The Twentieth Century*, featuring the gravitas of Walter Cronkite and, primarily, a recounting of some Great Victory of World War II.

I would argue that it is this, the quest for transcendent glory, that is the real reason for war. Yes, we have all kinds of high sounding excuses – the "liberation" of Iraq, preventing Iran from building out its nuclear capability, etc. – but what it really comes down to is that we just like to fight. It is only when we progressives are able to provide an equally compelling alternative that warfare will finally cease.