

CARLETON OBSERVER

“TRUTH IS THE MOST SACRED VIRTUE OF THE HUMAN HEART” - SENECA THE YOUNGER

VICTORY WITH HONOR

BY ALEX VON HAGEN-JAMAR

Democracies are far more sensitive to the costs of war than autocracies, and at times that leads to them having less staying power. Democracies win almost all the wars they fight, including when they are targeted. However, as war goes on, democracies become increasingly less likely to win. After about 18 months, the chances of a democracy winning fall below those of an autocracy. The Bush administration has misguidedly dubbed this a weakness, and, as a result, has prevented the press from covering the flag draped coffins of soldiers coming home from Iraq.

The Bush administration is right; democracies do have less chance of winning as time goes on. But they miss how closely tied that is to the military success of democracies. Democracies win most wars they fight because of their sensitivity to costs. They are less likely to fight, because the political cost of violence is higher than what most leaders are willing to pay. This means they only initiate wars they know they can win, and win quickly. When targeted, if they don't think they can win, they bargain, thus paying a small cost but again, avoiding war.

Evidence of the suppression of the costs of war and inflation of the cost of peace is all too apparent in Iraq, where fighting continues without an end in sight. A democracy with greater transparency and openness would not have chosen that war. We are not leaving Iraq, and can't now. But failing to realize the costs - whether you think they are worth it or not - endangers our country's future. We, as a people, cannot make the vital judgment of whether to wage war if our politicians are not honest about the price tag. The Bush administration has undermined the very thing that makes democracy a more militarily successful government than an autocracy: knowledge of the costs. He has done the opposite, demonizing enemies so much, frightening voters so fully, that the political costs of NOT going to war for a politician now outweigh the political costs of going to war. This eliminates the "selection benefit" democracies experience, and leads us into wars that we do not need to fight and should not choose to fight.

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RALLY ROUND THE QUOTE:

“I COUNT HIM BRAVER WHO OVERCOMES HIS DESIRES THAN HIM WHO CONQUERS HIS ENEMIES, FOR THE HARDEST VICTORY IS OVER SELF.”

--ARISTOTLE



VICTORY FROM PAGE 1

This mistake stems in part from a misunderstanding of the inherent nature of war. War is political, not just military. For example, President Bush is wrong when he says bin Laden wants to kill us because of our freedom; he wants to kill us because he believes that we are waging a war against Islam by occupying Muslim countries and supporting corrupt, secular governments. But to beat him, we have to demonstrate that our ideas, our goals, our system of living, really are better. We won the Cold war because we were able to do exactly that – not because we built better missiles than our opponent.

So, why are we prevented from seeing the flag draped bodies of our fallen soldiers? Is it out of respect? If it were, we would allow the whole country to honor them and their sacrifice by showing them. It is because it is politically dangerous for Bush and his allies. Less exposure to casualties should slow the decline of the political will for violence. Whether that is detrimental to the country does not seem to matter when compared to the political costs they might pay domestically. They believe they can win this war without being honest with our country. That stems from an underlying misunderstanding of war, for no matter how many battles we win, how many kills we get, we will not win this war until we realize that the struggle is political in nature, and is about policy and ideology, not guns and bombs.

Amendment to CSA Constitution to Appear on Winter Ballot by Andrew Navratil

The upcoming winter Carleton Student Association (CSA) election will include a referendum on a proposed Constitutional amendment. In addition to voting for Officers and Senators, students will be asked if they support amending the Constitution to allow sophomores to run for the office of President. If the referendum passes with two-thirds of the vote, the amendment will be immediately and automatically implemented. The proposed amendment was originally introduced in Senate by Senator Colin McLain during Fall Term. The proposal generated considerable discussion and debate. It was finally tabled at the end of the term. The recently convened CSA Constitutional Review Board discussed the issue and formally recommended to the Senate on January 10 that the amendment be placed on the ballot. Senate voted by an overwhelming majority to place it on the winter ballot.

Discussion in Senate prior to January 10 focused on the merits of the proposed amendment as well as the timing. The debate on merits focused primarily on the issue of experience. Some Senators believed that widening the pool to include sophomores would bring in candidates without the practical knowledge and experience to serve as President. They argued that some experience with student governance and simply another year of Carleton was necessary. Other Senators disagreed with this assertion, arguing that experience cannot be measured simply by class year. Furthermore, sophomores would not be doing comps during their term of office, and would have more time to dedicate to CSA duties.

The timing of the proposed amendment was hotly debated. Some Senators supported that a special referendum be held before winter elections so that sophomores could run this year, while others wanted it to appear on the regular ballot. A special referendum was seen by some as a potential conflict of interest. They argued that such a referendum would not be about the principle of allowing sophomores to run, but about certain individuals who wanted to run. They also argued that the winter election would have greater turnout than a special referendum. Other Senators maintained that if the student body supports such a change, there should be no reason to exclude sophomores this year. They further argued that holding a special referendum would give the current Senate time to observe the effects of the amendment and test the proposition that sophomores do not have the requisite experience.

In the end, the Senate decided to go ahead and place the proposed amendment on the regular winter ballot. The Senate, while not unanimously in support of the change, decided to allow students to make the decision. The student body must now decide if it wants to open the pool of Presidential candidates to include sophomores.

Editors Note: The Observer looks forward to a vigorous discussion on this issue. Please submit your opinion for publication.

STOP THE WAR ON TERROR!

BY ANDREW WEINER

So far, the War on Terror has cost the United States over 216.1 billion dollars. Stop and think about that for a second. That's \$216,100,000,000. That's a lot of money. In addition to the financial costs, we are expending enormous amounts of energy and suffering significant loss of life in the conflict. Of course, there are some persuasive arguments in favor of spending all of these resources to hunt down and kill terrorists. In the past ten years or so, terrorism has taken the lives of over 4,500 people and caused over \$95.6 billion worth of damage worldwide.

The intention of this article is not to trivialize these figures, but to show that there exists a much more menacing nemesis to humanity than terrorism: Mother Nature. In the past year alone, natural disasters have killed more than 155,000 people and caused over \$130 billion worth of damage. And that does not even include the recent tsunami that hit Asia...okay, yes it does, but you have to admit, the numbers are pretty staggering. It is time for the United States and, indeed, the world to ask itself: who poses a greater threat to our safety—terrorists or nature?

The tsunami is just the most recent example. We cannot forget about the recent string of hurricanes that devastated the state of Florida last year. And who knows how many people each year are mauled by grizzly bears, slaughtered by lions, and eaten by whales?

It is time for the United States and, indeed, the world to ask itself: who poses a greater threat to our safety—terrorists or nature?

Even plants are dangerous. I hear that you can get poisoned by eating certain types of mushrooms. Wait, mushrooms aren't really plants, are they? Well, hemlock is, and that killed Socrates. And I can't tell you how many stories I've heard of children falling out of trees and breaking bones—Mother Nature shows no mercy for the young.

In fact, when it comes down to it, pretty much everything about nature is dangerous. There are natural disasters like volcanoes, earthquakes, and tornados. There are hazardous natural locations like tall mountains, swift rivers, and the sun. And there are predatorial animals like sharks, tyrannosaurus rexes, and dogs. Yes dogs—I recently read an article about a puppy that shot its owner. Seriously. The enemy we are dealing with is cunning and unpredictable.

I think there is little doubt that we are losing the War on Nature. In fact, only our opponent has even declared war, while we do nothing in response. We seem to be hoping that we can make the problem go away by ignoring it. But that did not work with the wart on my ass, and it is not going to work now.

So what do I propose? Fight back! Lift all environmental regulations. Drive SUVs. Stop researching alternative sources of energy. Stop trying to maintain clean air and clean water. Eat meat. Cut down trees. Stop printing duplex. Don't recycle. All of these actions are only helping the enemy.

The human race must unite in this battle, for its outcome is far from certain. And we cannot allow liberal radicals to stand in our way. If they oppose our war, then we must not be afraid to stand up and declare the unpleasant truth: that they are traitors. Traitors to America. Traitors to Humanity.

But we will not fail. Not if we have resolve. Not if we end the War on Terror and focus on the real enemy. But we must do so quickly. Time is of the essence. The future of humanity hangs in the balance.

Editor's Note: If you didn't find humor or a point in this piece, write to the Observer and tell us what you would like to see instead. Or better yet, take the initiative and write an article yourself.

“All that is valuable in human society depends upon the opportunity for development accorded to the individual” --Albert Einstein

TORTUROUS LOGIC

BY DAVID SCHRAUB

THE CARLETON CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION COLUMN

We've all seen the horrendous pictures of American torture at Abu Gharib. But when's the last time we've heard about them? Despite everyone's professed shock and outrage over the incident, the fact remains that torture has become a non-issue in American politics today. It never came up once, even in passing, in the presidential debates. No person of substance has been held accountable. And it appears that one of the architects of American torture policy—Alberto Gonzales—is about to become our next Attorney General. For all our “outrage,” we seem pretty comfortable with torture, so long as it isn't on our front pages. And that's unfortunate.

America's greatness lies in the fact that, unique amongst nations, we hold a deep and abiding faith in the rights of humanity. These rights: to vote, to speak, to due process of law, are not subject to barter or negotiation.

In an ideal world, it would be unfortunate because torture betrays the core of the American value system. Sure, al-Qaeda isn't likely to apply the Geneva conventions if they ever capture one of our soldiers. But we aren't al-Qaeda, and the moment we start applying their standards for conducting our wars, we lose the moral high ground that justifies American action in the first place. America isn't great because we have the largest armed forces in the world, or because we have a giant stock market, or because we have a high GDP. America's greatness lies in the fact that, unique amongst nations, we hold a deep and abiding faith in the rights of humanity. These rights: to vote, to speak, to due process of law, are not subject to barter or negotiation. They are inherent possessions of all mankind. America recognized this long before anyone else did, and we became a light amongst nations for trying to spread those ideals to persons suffering under tyranny and oppression. Today, we run the risk of sacrificing that credibility and goodwill—ironically, doing it under the very banner of freedom and liberty that had represented hope for so many for so long.

But we don't live in an ideal world. We live in a world besieged by threats from all sides. Islamofascists with undying hatred for America threaten our values and very way of life; not to mention the future of Iraqis and Afghans who may for the first time have an opportunity to live in nations that hold elections and respect rule of law. Some say, ‘with the stakes so high, we can afford to turn a blind eye to the occasional abuse or mistreatment.’ These critics are misguided—and wrong. Every image of American abuse, every report of an “accidental” death of a prisoner in US hands, provides aid and comfort to our enemies. It galvanizes those who think that America is on an imperial mission, and it radicalizes those mistrustful of American motives. Foreign nations who might aid us in our quest now must ask the question: what are they hiding? What do they really want? Once upon a time the world could trust America to do the right thing. I fear those days are gone. And that isn't just a moral concern; it puts a dagger in the heart of our efforts to win the war on terror.

Other commentators dismiss the torture ordeal as the work of a few bad apples. These men and women are living in denial. Thirty detainees have lost their lives in American detention. Innumerable others have suffered outrageous abuse, abuse that is more reminiscent of the Iraqi regime we deposed than the narrative of “liberation.” Countless more were sent to be “interrogated” by dictatorial regimes—regimes we knew tortured their prisoners on a regular basis. Executive branch memos sought to justify torture in all but the most extreme situations—and argued that the American court system could do nothing to check it. The sad fact remains that the current administration tried to allow torture as a matter of policy, and has barely lifted a finger to rectify the situation.

It is time to look inside the mirror. We are America, a nation in which all persons are created equal, where every man, woman, and child has the right to a rule of law, due process, fair trials, and reasonable detentions. Do we cast aside the legacy of Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin so carelessly? And if we are no longer America, who will we become?

David runs a political/legal blog, The Debate Link: <http://dsadevil.blogspot.com>

WHEN APATHY ISN'T SUCH A BAD THING

BY PETER FRITZ

What's wrong with political apathy? Seriously. It seems like one of the few intellectual "crimes" which conservatives and liberals decry with almost equal fervency. This is not denying that it is a sign of healthy society for a broad spectrum of people to be involved in political activities, but simply questioning the need to approach apathy with almost a sense of hate. There is more than one reason why people prefer apathy to activism, and it's not simply some defect in their personality to be fixed.

Certainly one's own personality and nature can have something to do with it. I am unnaturally obsessed with politics by many people's standards and I do recognize that most people have not the desire to be similarly immersed in politics. In much the same way, there are people who immerse themselves in the creation of art in a manner that I would not only be completely unsuccessful at, but also would find impossible to tolerate. This may seem an odd comparison, but fundamentally politics is an exercise in imagination, just rather different in result than art. Creativity is required as much for governing, and understanding the governing of, a diverse mass of complex humans with complicated needs and wants, as activities such as painting, singing, or writing does. When thinking about involvement in politics as an act of creativity and imagination, one almost feels ashamed to view political apathy as a flaw, to be frightened into non-existence.

'fundamentally politics is an exercise in imagination, just rather different in result than art'

We politically inclined individuals are not totally off the hook, either. Apathy can just as easily stem from a sense of exclusion. Too often do liberals and conservatives attempt to disguise the diversity of opinions within their own bloc, thinking such diversity is a weakness and that it is far more important to engage in "base building." It would be very easy for an individual to feel compelled to accept the whole ideology of policy ends for a given bloc, even if they feel only slight philosophical sympathy for conservatives or liberals or less than whole-hearted interest in politics; such compulsion is unwelcome and off-putting, particularly if one feels that there is no room in either bloc for their particular views. The English language holds a rich political vocabulary, full of adjectives and nouns that allows a person to describe their political beliefs with whatever level of precision that they like: "conservative" or "liberal," "Burkean traditionalist," "Lockean," or untold others. All of those labels signify some nuance of philosophy, a multitude of ways of viewing political life that should not be obscured, particularly as a result of the most cynical of motivations.

Obscuring the richness of political variation not only hurts those people who are turned away from politics because of it, but it also hurts the very people who believe they benefit from less variation. Political ideas ought to be refined by the fire of vigorous critique, not only conservatives critiquing liberal ideas, but conservatives strongly and honestly critiquing conservatives, and liberals doing the same. Without intellectually honest fights over policy ends, the policies that end up on the table won't be the best product of our minds.

'Obscuring the richness of political variation not only hurts those people who are turned away from politics because of it, but it also hurts the very people who believe they benefit from less variation'

Political apathy shouldn't be treated like leprosy or some other wretched disease. For one thing, there is quite a bit politically engaged people can do to make political engagement more appealing. And let's not lose sight of political engagement as an act of imagination. Although I wish and hope that those who are politically apathetic would become less so, my friends no doubt wish I would learn to sing on pitch.

DOUBLE STANDARDS IN THE SCOTT PETERSON TRIAL

BY MOLLY CHRISTIAN

On November 12, Scott Peterson was convicted of two counts of murder for killing his pregnant wife and their unborn baby. Peterson was accused of killing his wife Laci in their home, and then dumping her body into the San Francisco Bay. Laci and her child's body were found four months later in the bay close to where Peterson claimed to have been fishing alone the day his wife disappeared. On December 13, Peterson's jury recommended the death penalty.

This case has been attentively watched by people across the country, with many people convinced that Peterson was guilty. However, this case was appealing because of more than just the fact of guilt or innocence. It is the basis for a double standard in our nation today. How can Scott Peterson be charged for the murder of a life that could have legally been taken by abortion? The question of if the intent of the action matters, and if so to what degree, must arise from this case.

What if Scott Peterson were to appeal his second murder conviction on the grounds that he was trying to perform an abortion, and thus, should be charged with something akin to practicing medicine without a license instead of murder? An appeal like this would definitely put the State of California in a difficult position, especially if it reached the Supreme Court. Although a scenario like that is highly unlikely, because of judicial inconsistencies concerning the status of an unborn child, situations similar to it are definitely possible.

The ongoing controversy over abortion is at the center of this issue. Much of the abortion debate is centered around whether a person believes that life begins at conception, birth, or when the baby is able to live outside the womb. For those supporters of abortion who argue that life doesn't begin until after birth, how can Scott Peterson be charged for a double murder? Isn't it conflicting for someone to be charged for taking a life that could have been legally taken by abortion?

It's understood that the main difference between these cases, and therefore between abortion and murder, is whether or not consent is given by the mother. In the case of abortion, the mother of the child has the right to choose the child's fate and in murder cases that is taken out of her hands. In either case, however, the unborn baby still dies. If this action is deemed to have fallen within the law, then it could be said that no one can be prosecuted for this. It's not an argument that Scott Peterson should not be charged with the murder of his unborn child, but judicial consistency is needed. It seems that in these two different situations we have two different definitions of what a child is.

The Observer is a non-partisan journal of social and political commentary. The opinions expressed herein are the sole creations of their authors. The Observer welcomes articles and letters from all viewpoints, and seeks to promote a diversity of keen and insightful thought at Carleton. Thanks for reading!

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This is not a problem that is going to go away any time soon. Laws about unborn homicide victims vary from state to state. There is no consistency, and the number of maternity deaths in the United States is constantly rising.

A year-long examination by *The Washington Post* of death-record data in states across the country documents the killings of 1,367 pregnant women and new mothers since 1990. This is a number that will continue to rise. If a fetus is considered to be a child in one case, it should also be a child in the other. No matter how the child dies, an unnecessary death still takes place. The definition of a human life should be the same no matter the situation.

"As soon as questions of will or decision or reason or choice of action arise, human science is at a loss." --Noam Chomsky

FAITH AND ROE

BY JEREMY SAIRSINGH

If you let yourself get sucked into an abortion debate, you quickly find that your discussion descends into questions that cannot be answered with even the most ingenious arguments and airtight logic. You begin exchanging questions regarding the nature of the soul, human destiny, and the value of life. No amount of philosophizing will resolve any of these issues. Every perspective has an equally qualified doctor/philosopher/bioethicist willing to defend it. No, nothing will be solved in rational debate, for these are issues of the heart, and for many, articles of religious faith.

When the abortion issue arose during one of the presidential debates, John Kerry said, "I can't take what is an article of faith for me and legislate it for someone who doesn't share that article of faith, whether they be agnostic, atheist, Jew, Protestant, whatever. I can't do that." Kerry was basically saying, don't mix your personal values with public policy. If that's true, what principles does one use in forming their opinions? There cannot be neutral ground. No matter what, a person is going to base their decisions on their personal values, whether they come from the Bible, the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, or just whatever one feels is "right."

Many will be quick to interject that the First Amendment exists to guard against the influence of religion upon law. So, that must mean that people who hold religiously grounded values must somehow divorce those values for the public sphere, taking on some sort of secular perspective, keeping what they believe to themselves. Sure, they are free to live however they want - as long as they do not try to act like their beliefs are universally true.

In the case of abortion, if I were to believe with full conviction that a fetus is a human life, entitled to legal protection, it does not matter to me what you view that fetus as. If you kill it, it is the same as killing another person. You can preach tolerance for other perspectives all you want, but ultimately, it comes down to the fact that I see it as the deliberate killing of a human being at its most vulnerable stage. Faith is more than tradition. It's a lens through which you see the world around you. In a democratic society, people have the right to incorporate faith-based values into their political life, petitioning their governments, and electing officials whose values reflect their own.

ABORTION STATISTICS

- Approximately 46 million abortions are conducted each year, 20 million of them obtained illegally
- Approximately 126,000 abortions are conducted each day
- 52% of women who have an abortion are younger than 25 years old and 19% are teenagers; women aged 18 to 19 have the highest rate of abortion
- Approximately 1,370,000 abortions occur annually in the US
- Unmarried women are 6 times more likely than married women to have an abortion
- 88% of abortions occur in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy
- 43% of the decline in abortion from 1994-2000 can be attributed to using emergency contraception

WHY DO WOMEN CHOOSE TO HAVE AN ABORTION?

- 25.5% of women want to postpone childbearing
- 21.3% of women cannot afford a baby
- 14.1% of women have a relationship issue or their partner does not want a child
- 12.2% of women are too young (their parents or others object to the pregnancy)
- 10.8% of women feel a child will disrupt their education or career
- 1.9% of women want no (more) children
- 3.3% of women have an abortion due to a risk to fetal health
- 2.8% of women have an abortion due to a risk to maternal health

-from the Alan Guttmacher Institute: <http://www.agi-usa.org/>

THE VIRTUE OF CHOICE

BY RAWDON BERGQUIST

This week, a good chunk of the country celebrated the anniversary of Roe v Wade. Another good chunk of the country was horrified that thousands of souls never got a chance at life, erased from existence before even taking a breath. Of these two opposing groups who call themselves pro-choice and pro-life, how is one to choose a side? Surely you must appreciate life; hopefully you would find a pro-life group appealing. However, an anti-choice group is perhaps worse; can you choose life or death at all, or could you even choose to join the group or has that also been decided for you? Do you risk death for choice; do you sacrifice virtue for life?

Why risk this choice itself? Is temptation to immorality to be confronted or avoided? Which is greater testament to strength of character and virtue of heart? The virtuous society would not deal with the issue, for they would not suffer the problems of incest, premarital sex, poor family planning, rape, or a simple lack of abstinence. The virtuous society would still ask the question, but they would already know the answer. We are not angels, but that does not mean we lack the choice.

How many Albert Einsteins and Martin Luther Kings, how many Mother Teresas and Mahatma Ghandis have never had the opportunity to exercise choice, to savor it, to live it, to choose life or death themselves? They did not choose to be conceived, but they were, and thus were given the gift of life, the gift of choice. That choice was taken from them.

But wait, what about the mother's choice, or even the father's? Would you restrict their choices? For they choose to give that child future choice or not. Living is to choose life, and by what right would one restrict choice? For choice allows the exercise of virtue, and in its absence, the opportunities for its expression are non-existent. To deny someone choice is to deny them virtue itself, for one must choose to be virtuous in their actions and thoughts. I ask you then, which society is more virtuous, the one which willfully chooses the right path or the one who is compelled to out of fear of the knock on the door?

This debate is not about life or death, it is about virtue. The choice of life or death is yet another opportunity for virtue or sin, greater decisions than others, but a choice of virtue still. Do you choose to help others because of a reward or your benevolence? Do you write a check for new shoes or for disaster relief? Do you get drunk this weekend and have sex or write a letter and abstain until marriage? You have that choice, you can choose to face temptation or avoid it, choose sin or virtue. Live to choose and choose to live, for that is liberty and that is the path to virtue.

But who am I to judge, for I do not see the log in my own eye.

“The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts: therefore, guard accordingly, and take care that you entertain no notions unsuitable to virtue and reasonable nature.”

--Marcus Aelius Aurelius

“All virtue is summed up in dealing justly.”

--Aristotle

Questions? Comments?

Want to Burn this Issue?

We want to hear your opinion.

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