

tarians aggressively overlook the obvious. Let us never forget the great libertarian Randolph Bourne's analysis of the crucial distinction between "the nation" (the land, the culture, the terrain, the people) and "the State" (the coercive apparatus of bureaucrats and politicians), and of his important conclusion that one may be a true patriot of one's nation or country while —and even for that very reason—opposing the State that rules over it.

In addition, the libertarian, especially of the anarcho-capitalist wing, asserts that it makes no difference where the boundaries are, since in a perfect world all institutions and land areas would be private and there would be no national boundaries. Fine, but in the meantime, in the real world, in which language should the government courts hold their proceedings? What should be the language of the signs on the government streets? Or the language of the government schools? In the real world, then, national self-determination is a vitally important matter on which libertarians should properly take sides.

Finally, nationalism has its disadvantages for liberty, but also has its strengths, and libertarians should try to help tip it in the latter direction. If we were residents of Yugoslavia, for example, we should be agitating in favor of the right to secede from that swollen and misbegotten State of Croatia and Slovenia (that is, favoring their current nationalist movements), while opposing the desire of the Serb demagogue Slobadan Milosevich to cling to Serb domination over the Albanians in Kosovo or over the Hungarians in

the Vojvodina (that is, opposing Great Serbian nationalism). There is, in short, national liberation (good) versus national "imperialism" over other peoples (bad). Once get over simplistic individualism, and this distinction should not be difficult to grasp. •

Our Pro-Death Culture by the Old Curmudgeon

I don't care much for shrinks, especially the psycho-analytic branch of the Church. But the late Bruno Bettelheim will be missed as a man of substance—especially for his tough-minded and exhilarating defense of fairy-stories against the gringes of Left-Puritanism who would deprive children of their world of fantasy and of wonder on behalf of a bowdlerized and sanitized Dick-and-Jane culture.

It was therefore particularly sad to read about the aged Bettelheim's recent suicide, covered in detail by the press, especially in a typically interesting in-depth study in the *L.A. Times*. But questions and comments come to mind that escaped the purview of the reporters. For example: surrounded by long-term friends who are shrinks, and by daughters who are shrinks, how come that none of these distinguished psychologists saw any signs of Bettelheim's loneliness and depression that would lead to suicide? More to the point: why did his shrink daughters break with him and refuse to see him any longer? And what does this say about their humanity, or about the humanity of shrinks in gen-

eral?

The *L.A. Times* struck an especially grisly note. It reported that when Bettelheim moved from the West Coast to a Washington, D.C.-area rest home, a cocktail party welcoming him was held, at which one young lady, noting that the guest of honor was depressed, went over to him and suggested that he get in touch with the Hemlock Society. "Do you know the Hemlock Society?" "Do you know the Euthanasia Society?" Etc. It turns out that Bettelheim was a founder of the Hemlock group, but the thing that should give us pause is: what kind of rotten and debased culture do we have where so many people—shrinks, welfare workers, do-gooders in general, are anxious and eager to help spirit people to their death?

I wish to make it clear: as a libertarian I believe in the absolute legal right of a person to commit suicide, and even the absolute right of do-gooders to offer to help in this project. But as a civilized man, I find helping others to their death absolutely odious and reprehensible. Surely it is the task of shrinks, relatives, friends, and general do-gooders to help people live, to try to live longer and fuller lives, and not to speed them on their way to the grave. When I read this account of poor Bettelheim at the cocktail party, I could think of nothing more apt than the image of a smiling, leering Bela Lugosi-type, taking his victim's hand, and saying, "Come, my dear, let me help you die." Any society where such contract-killers flourish (even among consensual adults) is a society that is rapidly going to Hell in a hand-basket. It is high time to assert

the supreme value of human life, as against death.

It all started some years ago, I remember, with a repellent physician named Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who started going on television preaching a pro-death line. By now you've heard it all many times—how foolishly optimistic Americans are, how pro-life and progress, how they neglect the importance of death, how Americans should join other, wiser cultures in honoring and even glorifying death, etc. Since then, we've been succumbing to more and more of this rot. Twenty years ago, one would have been considered absurdly obvious in raising the banner of Life, Not Death. Now, however, such an act has become a moral necessity.

Can you imagine how much fun C.S. Lewis would have had with all this? In a new edition of *Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape might write to his diabolic agents, "First, we preach to people about the importance and greatness of death. Then, we offer to help them along..."

The above was written before the dramatic emergence of "Dr. Death" Jack Kevorkian and his "Suicide Machine." Dr. Death makes our discussion all the more relevant. Physicians, like shrinks, are supposed to help people live not die. Dr. Death is not only violating the canons of official medical ethics. For if medicine is not grounded firmly on a life rather than a death ethic, we are far down the slippery slope to the notorious Dr. Mengele and his "mad scientist" experiments in the name of advancing scientific knowledge. Pat Buchanan, in his dis-

ussion of this issue, reports that in Holland, hospitals are already going over the voluntary "Living Will" line and regularly terminating the lives of elderly patients at the physicians' own discretion, i.e. committing murder. And in Holland, there are no protests.

We are reminded of such science fiction movies as "Logan's Run," where all people are automatically killed on their 30th birthday, in the name of being "translated into a higher immortal state," and "Soylent Green," where old people are systematically checked into a luxurious resort hotel from which they can never emerge—except as recyclable organic material to feed the still-living population. But in these films the situation is supposed to be grisly and monstrously evil. Nowadays, however, there are pro-death signs everywhere in our culture.

In two current daytime TV soaps, similar issues are dramatically portrayed with an evident pro-death bias. In "As the World Turns," young incurably ill Dr. Casey Perretti urges his stepdaughter Margo to pull the plug just before he goes into a coma. She does so, even though as a policewoman she knows she is violating the law as well as her oath. It is clear that the people who react in horror at her decision are either being irrational (the bereaved widow, her mother), rigid sticklers for the law (her husband the district attor-

ney), and oldsters who are imprisoned by the old pro-life culture (the doctor's mother). On the other hand, Margo's friend and young female shrink (and therefore the epitome of Modern Enlightenment) Frannie says she would have probably done the same. But at least Margo agonizes over her decision.

On "The Bold and the Beautiful," the situation is different, but young publisher Caroline Spencer, suffering from an unnamed imminently terminal ailment, walks around with an insufferable serene smile (also looking no worse for wear and experiencing no pain), manipulating other people like mad with her illness as her excuse, and, worst of all, dispensing a stream of highly irritating pro-death philosophic pronouncements, e.g., that dying gives you unique wisdom to see reality deeply; and that death is a value-free event: "Death is simply an experience, no better or worse than any other." Pretty soon, the sensible viewer is ready himself to take steps to put Caroline out of her happiness.

The question of a pro-life ethic should not be limited, as it virtually is today, to the vexed abortion issue. However we feel about the life of fetuses, it seems to me clear that we should be firm as a rock on the question of life for the "post-born." And yet we're not. And why is it that, even without taking a poll or reading any libertarian views on this is-

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sue, I have a strong hunch that our old friend, the Modal Libertarian, is all in favor of Dr. Death?

What has happened to our culture, and why are we in our present fix? Could it be the result of the general abandonment of Christianity and the Christian ethic? Or could it be the result of the American mania for perfect beauty and fitness that southern California has foisted upon us? And that therefore, if we are no longer twenty-five and a "perfect 10" with an optimal cholesterol level, we may as well pack it in? So that the same Enlightened People who brought us massive systemic guilt in the wake of a promised hedonism, have also brought us death in the name of perfect health and beauty? ●

— M.N.R.

The Flag Flap

by M.N.R.

There are many curious aspects to the latest flag fracas. There is the absurdity of the proposed change in our basic constitutional framework by treating such minor specifics as a flag law. There is the proposal to outlaw "desecration" of the American flag. "Desecration" means "to divest of a sacred character or office." Is the American flag, battle emblem of the U.S. government, supposed to be "sacred"? Are we to make a religion of statolatry? What sort of grotesque religion is that?

Civil libertarians have long placed their greatest stress on a sharp difference between "speech" and "action," and the claim that the First Amendment covers only speech and not actions (except, of course, for the definite action of printing and distribution of a pam-

phlet or book, which would come under the free press clause of the First Amendment.) But, as the flag amendment advocates point out, what kind of "speech" is burning a flag? Isn't that most emphatically an action—and one that cannot come under the free press rubric? The fallback position of the civil libertarians, as per the majority decisions in the flag cases by Mr. Justice Brennan, is that flag burning is "symbolic" speech, and therefore, although an action, comes under the free speech protection.

But "symbolic speech" is just about as inane as the "desecration" doctrine of the flag-law advocates. The speech/action distinction now disappears altogether, and every action can be excused and protected on the ground that it constitutes "symbolic speech." Suppose, for example, that I were a white racist, and decided to get a gun and shoot a few blacks. But then I could say, that's OK because that's only "symbolic speech," and political symbolic speech at that, because I'm trying to make a political argument against our current pro-black legislation.

Anyone who considers such an argument far-fetched should ponder a recent decision by a doty leftist New York judge to the effect that it is "unconstitutional" for the New York subway authorities to toss beggars out of the subway stations. The jurist's argument held that begging is "symbolic speech," an expressive argument for more help to the poor. Fortunately, this argument was overturned on appeal, but still "symbolic arguers" are everywhere in New York, clogging streets, airports, and bus terminals.

There is no way, then, that flag laws can be declared unconstitutional as violations of the First Amendment. The problem with flag laws has nothing to do with free speech, and civil libertarians have got caught in their own trap because they do in fact try to separate speech and action, a separation that is artificial and cannot long be maintained.

As in the case of all dilemmas caused by the free speech doctrine, the entire problem can be resolved by focusing, not on a high-sounding but untenable right to freedom of speech, but on the natural and integral right to private property and its freedom of use. As even famed First Amendment absolutist Justice Hugo Black pointed out, no one has the free-speech right to burst into your room and harangue you about politics. "The right to freedom of speech" really means the right to hire a hall and expound your views; the "right to freedom of press" (where, as we have seen, speech and action clearly cannot be separated) means the right to print a pamphlet and sell it. In short, free speech or free press rights are a subset, albeit an important one, of the rights of private property: the right to hire, to own, to sell.

Keeping our eye on property rights, the entire flag question is resolved easily and instantly. Everyone has the right to buy (or weave) and therefore own a piece of cloth in the shape and design of an American flag (or in any other design) and to do with it what he will: fly it, burn it, defile it, bury it, put it in the closet, wear it, etc. Flag laws are unjustifiable laws in violation of the rights of private property. (Constitutionally, there are many clauses in the