

Anti-War, Anti-Terror: The Body Politic

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(Dated: 2010-04-13)

I'm wondering if the collected political parties will empower the following. In the US it has been a point of contention for some time that corporations have, in certain conveniently profitable ways, similar rights to those of individuals. However, it is possible that the gap between rights and responsibilities on this question has been left open and fuzzy; that corporations have been quick to grab rights and slow to take on responsibilities ('externalities' = costs). Much of the debate has centered around preventing corporations from labelling odious side-effects of their business as externalities, and then walking away from cleaning up after themselves. One possible solution is to turn the talk away from rights to one that is purely concerned with responsibilities. Corporations often shout loudly about their responsibilities towards shareholders, but why should they only have responsibilities in that limited direction?

Rights are often expressed (nominally) as proposed freedoms: Freedom to walk about, gain an education, not get assaulted by priests, bear arms, etc. Upper bounds on these are then encoded by more specific laws: "By all means bear arms, but the bearer can only shoot deer in season and beer cans out of season." But many think that corporate lobbying of governments has distorted the form of the resulting laws. "OK, if you are a corporation, bear arms and shoot beer cans, even if small children are standing behind the beer cans; if a bullet maims a small child it is clearly the child's fault for standing in the wrong place at the wrong time. Just walk away whistling and don't look back."

The most important task of our times, it seems to me, is to make corporations self-policing when it comes to the maintenance of an ethical conscience. The best way to make that happen, by analogy with contemporary economic theory, is to make ethics profitable, so that companies compete with each other to be more ethical. And ideally, the rest of us would like being ethical to be more 'profitable' than being merely financially profitable for the shareholders. However, I suspect most of the population would like to use a different word, rather than 'profitable', when talking about ethical improvement.

The grand collusions between national banks, capital, corporations, politicians and the military industrial complex are a direct consequence of the absence of ethics from the design of money. Ethics is hard to put a price on. To an excessive extent, therefore, all that matters to many is the quantity of money hoarded, and whether a front of "plausible deniability" (a.k.a. an alibi) can be maintained. Thanks to the monetary design of nations, these collusions frequently get rubber-stamped under the cloak of national security (as they concern the capital bank balance). It gives rise to feeble talk of rights and responsibilities for Joe Public, and a completely different set (or absence) of rules for GovCorps. The resulting, frequently inconsistent mash-up, is the collective or international ethics of our time. Many see a need for improvement, but always the question is: How? The System, as the above is often called, is rather resilient. But there might be some ways to partition it.

For consumer goods, it has become possible for consumers to wound some (superstructure) corporations for unethical behaviour by boycotting their products. Infrastructure corporations, like oil companies, are harder to wound without personal loss. But where government spending is involved, the public has no franchise. Elected representatives are (in modern 'democracies', at least) bound under national laws to uphold national security above all, and the war machine and its capital exploitation have been (erroneously, some would say) identified with that for a long time. The situation is no different when states become superstates like the EU. The collusion just gets grander, because to an excessive extent the security situation is a product of the machinery. Fear begets greater fear, because greater fear implies greater profits, profits imply more taxes and kickbacks, fear-mongering (or war-mongering) becomes political currency, and so on, spiralling onwards. This occurs if these profits outweigh the losses of international trade from mutual distrust impacting other industry sectors. It is also a curious fact that this process can acquire, in the eyes of many participants, an ethical guise once an enemy has been identified.

Which brings us to the enemy du jour - the terrorist. Seriously, if terrorists want to harm the developed Westernised nations then by the above arguments the best way they can do that is to stop being terrorists. Would-be terrorists can instead sit back and watch as panic sets in within the military industrial complex and elsewhere, as the political rationale for recycling capital through arms contracts dies away. Meanwhile, they should invest their monies in green technologies and land purchases, become self-sustaining and live long happy lives. Or alternatively, they should buy video cameras, foil bomb plots, and film every single military movement they can, dumping the results on to the internet. The richest few might want to buy out arms corporation shares, and steer these companies into more peaceful activities. To argue that the best option is to strap on a bomb and blow a few civilians to pieces is dim. All that does is improve the profits from militarism and make matters worse.

As a last resort, would-be terrorists should paint their bodies with the logos of arms manufacturers, stand in open spaces in just their underpants (without incendiary devices therein), make sure they are filmed by international news services, and then deliberately fail to blow themselves up.