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Essay of Support from a Maine Citizen

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There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

Hamlet II, 2

When we look back on the history of the world, one of the first things which strikes us is the great amount of injustices man has heaped upon his fellow man. It appears that no age or country has been spared these embarrassing moments --- embarrassing, that is, when looked back upon by an enlightened future. The treatment of the Jews throughout the Old Testament, the persecution of the Christians under the Romans, the Inquisition of heretics by the Catholic Church, the obliteration of the American Indian by the white colonists, the execution of Jews by Hitler's Nazis, the black-listing of Communists by Joe McCarthy. All of these injustices, and these are only a small handful, are now looked upon with horror. We are appalled that people who considered themselves civilized could have acted in so barbaric a fashion.

What could have caused people to act this way, to turn against other people and to persecute them unmercifully? The answer, as we are all too painfully aware, is fear. Fear of a different opinion, a different belief, a different lifestyle. And why do we fear anybody different? Obviously, it is because we are unsure of ourselves, of our opinions and beliefs. We do not feel safe while there are people unlike us roaming around at large. After all, if we don't destroy them, they will destroy us. Anybody different is bad. It's only common sense. After all, if we are good (and we are good), and they are not like us, it only stands to reason that they are bad. And everything bad should be destroyed so that the world will be a good place. But most of us who try to suppress others don't only act out of a selfless desire to eliminate evil. Rather,
we are acting out of a selfish motive. We must destroy, or at least repress, the other group lest others find out that they are not really bad after all. And if they are not bad, they must be good. And if they are good, and we oppose them, then we must be bad. And since it is imperative that we retain our image of goodness, it is necessary that we destroy anybody different.

The problem with this kind of reasoning can be seen when we look back in time. We see that neither the persecuted nor the persecutor were either good or bad. They were simply different. Usually, one was neither better nor worse than the other. They just had different opinions, beliefs, and life styles. But one group would become unsure of itself and rise up to suppress the other group. And it is then, and only then, that the question of good and bad even comes up.

For future generations remember suppressors as frightened, hysterical eccentrics who took on a visible form of evil. Though most people know right from wrong, and though most people realize that persecuting someone for his beliefs is wrong, most people apply the reasoning I have sketched out above to convince themselves that things are different and that this time it is right to try to force others to become like themselves. This is most unfortunate, because with the great distance of time, we are all made to look like ignorant barbarians.

Can this image, which we seem doomed to project to future generations, be altered? Can we somehow save ourselves from the chain which has dragged down every other civilization in the past? Can we possibly be as civilized and enlightened as we like to think we are? I see no reason why not. I see no reason why we can't replace fear with understanding. I see no reason why we can't live up to our full potential as human beings. And I see no reason why we should ever suppress another group of people on the sole basis of their being different.
Unfortunately, some people don't realize that they have no solid basis for their fears. These people are blindly plowing ahead, trying to bury another group of people because they are different, and at the same time planting the seeds of prejudice and inhumanity in our time. These people are trying to prevent a gay liberation convention from taking place at the Orono campus of the University of Maine. Their reasoning? They fear that the "fine image and reputation of the university could be seriously damaged by this convention." Such glittering generalities, which mean nothing, are being used to promote an image of selfless, public concern. But if we take time to think about the above statement we must ask ourselves how a convention aimed at promoting understanding between people can ruin a university's image. It doesn't seem to make sense. So why are these people so frightened? As I have mentioned earlier, most people who oppose a differing group are not sure of themselves. So I think we would not be too far off the mark to say that those who oppose the convention are unsure of their own sexuality. Therefore, they must suppress the homosexual to protect themselves. They are acting out of blind fear against something they don't understand. The homosexuals simply want to meet in order to discuss their way of life, the prejudices which they encounter daily, and what can be done to insure them equal civil rights. They are not interested in converting anybody to their way of life. In fact, the last thing they want is to become physically attracted to a straight person, as this would only lead to frustration and pain all around. They simply want to be recognized and accepted for what they are. They want to receive the respect which is due every human being. They do not envisage a world populated solely by homosexuals. They do not wish to ban all heterosexual activity. They simply want to be allowed to lead their own lives without being persecuted.

Whereas homosexuals are not trying to suppress anybody, it is obvious many heterosexuals are trying to suppress them. This attempt at suppression has ap-
peared in the shape of letters being sent to University personnel and State legis-
lators. Though these letters, in themselves, are relatively harmless, we mustn't fail to see that the energy expended in their make-up could have been better used in trying to build up understanding and acceptance towards a group of people who have always existed and who probably always will. The people sending the letters are acting hysterically. They are envisioning a mass of homosexuals invading them like the plague, infecting every household, destroying their "normal" way of life. They fail to realize that most people are not inclined to homosexuality, and repeated exposure to it will leave them totally unaffected. Well, maybe not totally. Some may find their capacity for tolerance and understanding increased. But their sexual desires will remain unchanged.

The most surprising things about this whole affair are both the source and the target of the criticism. Most of the letters supporting suppression are form letters which have been distributed by a Rev. Robert Gass of the Pentecostal Assembly of Bangor. A church trying to prevent such a convention from taking place on a University campus is a travesty. It is against the very nature of what both these institutions are supposed to represent. Most Churches claim the Golden Rule as the basis on which their teachings are founded. If Rev. Gass does believe in doing unto others as he would have done unto himself, he must then logically be a masochist in search of persecution. If he doesn't believe in the Golden Rule, then he has no business being a clergyman as he is abusing the responsibility entrusted to him. The same goes for the University. According to John Milton, "The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him..." Though most educators today would not define the end of learning in such a manner, I think few would disagree with its basic premise, which is that the purpose of education is to help make the student a better and more understanding person. And the student is then expected to go out and help make the
community and the world in which he lives a better place. That is the goal of education. And a university, as an institute of higher learning, should be willing to set an example. It should be willing to enlighten the people. We must keep in mind that repression is not part of education. It is the opposite. We must not forget the horror we feel when we look back on other examples of repression: the Church's treatment of heretics during the Middle Ages, Hitler's treatment of the Jews during the War, Stalin's treatment of traitors to the Party, our treatment of Blacks since even before the Revolution, the unenlightened public's treatment of the mentally ill just a few years ago. Let us not add our treatment of homosexuals to this list.

I think the Board of Trustees should be commended for their strong stand, rather than be criticized for it. As Ibsen once wrote: "The majority has MIGHT on its side---unfortunately; but RIGHT it has NOT. I am in the right---I and a few other scattered individuals." I am glad to see that these few individuals which the playwright is referring to have been scattered together in the form of the Board of Trustees. And I certainly hope that they will continue to display the strength and courage needed when the forces of right are threatened by those of might.

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