

Olympic battle goes past the ice

As the list grows of those charged in the Kerrigan case, one name has yet to be added: Tonya Harding.

Many indications have been made that Harding has had some involvement in the case, but she has not been charged with a crime. The only trial she has had is from the media. In a poll on the radio asking for a vote on whether she should be able to compete in the Olympics, she was losing.

Harding is entitled to keep her spot on the U.S. Olympic team until she is found to be directly involved in the conspiracy.

The International Committee of the U.S. Figure Skating Association is expected to vote next week whether Harding should remain on the team roster, and the U.S. Olympic Committee is to decide by Jan. 31. Harding can be removed by a majority vote from the committee but must have a hearing and be given a chance to dispute the evidence against her before being banned from the U.S. Olympic team.

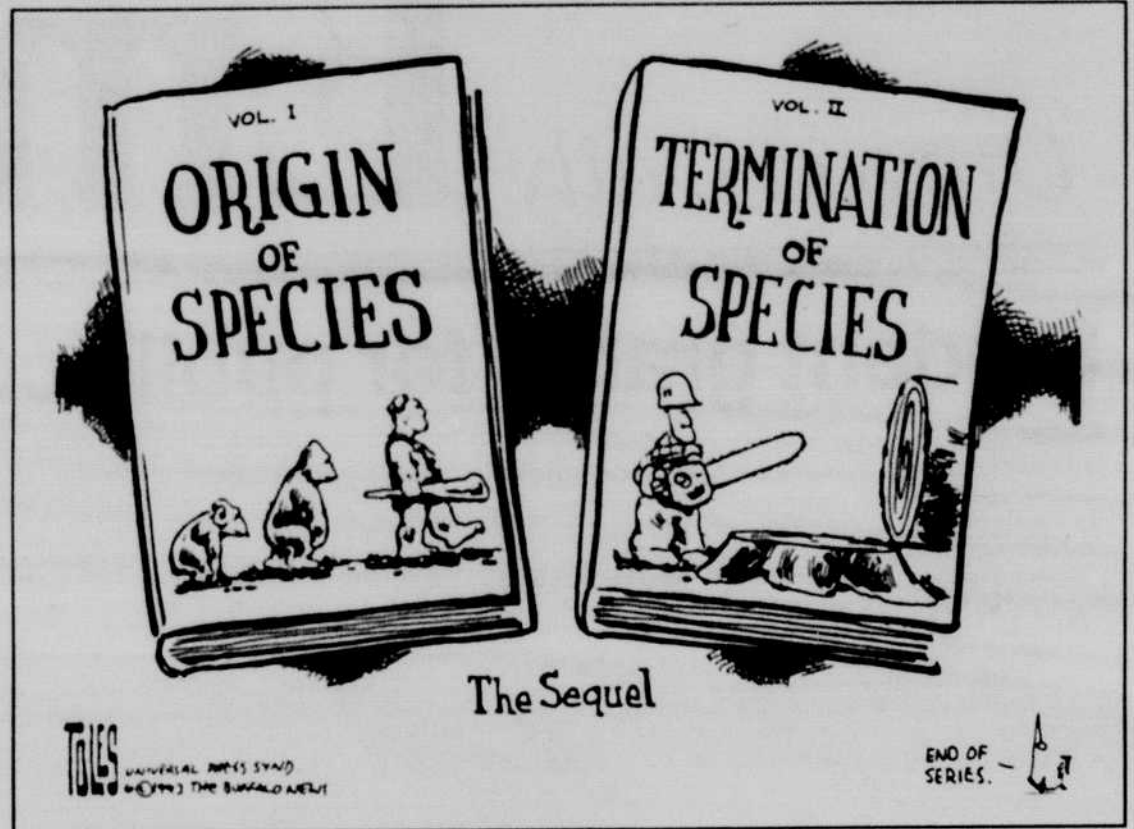
Unfortunately, for Harding, the burden of proof for the skating commission is less than a criminal case, less than a preponderance of evidence that some misdeed has occurred. LeRoy Walker, president of the U.S. Olympic Committee, said the easiest thing would be for Harding to step down.

Even if in fact she has had no involvement in the conspiracy, the Olympic Committee still deems stepping down to be the easiest thing. Sure, the easiest thing for the committee. However, asking an Olympic athlete to step down sounds a little out of context and slightly ridiculous. Since when does anyone expect an Olympic athlete to take the easy way out? That would directly contradict the whole theory behind an athlete's efforts to compete at the Olympic level. Voluntarily stepping down may mean voluntarily ending a lifelong career in figure skating.

Harding has not been charged, despite a few fingers being pointed, but she should fight this one until the bitter end. Backing down to the politics, if they are just politics, that link her to the Kerrigan case should not stop her attempt at an Olympic medal. The spirit of competition should go far past the ice in this Olympic event; it should extend deep into the decision of Harding's fate on the Olympic team.

Olympic officials are concerned with the effect Harding's appearance will have at the Olympic Games. That sounds like an official thing to be concerned with. Maybe it's a good idea to mar appearances if, in fact, one of the world's best figure skaters has less than the preponderance of evidence that a misdeed has occurred. But voluntarily stepping down sounds like an "official" thing to ask for.

Obviously if she is found to be linked with the conspiracy, her Olympic dream will quickly become a nightmare, if it isn't already. The possibility that her involvement in the conspiracy is nothing more than an allegation exists. It might be a good idea to weigh both sides of the argument before deciding to request her resignation — not just a resignation to the Olympic Games but a resignation to a life-long battle to become the best.



COMMENTARY

'Superiority a frivolous notion'

By Benjamin K. Ross and Kathleen M. Van Winkle

Regarding Dave Thorn's commentary on the superiority of humans over the creatures of the earth (*ODE*, Jan. 12): We, too, believe that the sentiment "All forms of life are equal" is ridiculous. Such a frivolous statement denies categorically the uniqueness and diversity of nature's life forms. However, the notion of human superiority is equally frivolous and unsound.

Before we delve into the specific flaws in Thorn's argument/discussion, let me reproach his methodology. That is, if humans are setting the standards by which superiority is to be evaluated, it is a foregone conclusion that the human will be superior according to those standards. To speak of superiority is to assume relative value within nature's dynamic system. In such a system the balance of each part relies on the balance of its surrounding parts. Thus, relative value has no meaning in a real sense. All parts contribute in a cyclical interdependency. To talk of superiority is to place such a part in isolation from its surroundings. If you are indeed superior, what contributes to your superiority? Well, it must be all those "inferior," though necessary, life forms that your body relies on for life.

An argument should compel agreement through its logic, not its impression. To define superiority requires a set of standards accepted by those doing the judging. Thorn's standard was the application of intelligence. Thus the tobacco-spitting blue-coats of the Western frontier were vastly superior to the Native Americans hounded to their graves by just such a standard. Such criteria contain deep implications of racism, classism and fascism. Whether Thorn regards himself as superior to the natives of decades past is conjecture, but his definition implies that he does. When the definitions of an argument can be turned against themselves to produce conclusions the author

never intended nor desired, that argument loses all its power to persuade a person who can think abstractly enough to analyze the method of the argument rather than the content itself.

Question: Does a superior being need to justify its own superiority?

Question: Does a superior being ravage its surroundings for its own short-term gain and luxury?

Regarding Thorn's claim that zoologists "have yet to determine conclusively whether animals understand 'cause and effect'": We believe Pavlov resolved that issue in decades past.

Regarding his lazy dolphin hypothesis: The Protestant work ethic, so evident in his assertion, does not apply to dolphins. If they so choose a life of contemplation and harmless query, so be it. As far as the superiority of our great achievements, obviously Thorn has not visited a strip mine recently. We suggest that he study the actual manifestations of applied intelligence and weigh the balance for himself. It is easy for individuals to place themselves and the application of their intelligence in isolation from the consequences of that application.

Regarding his pig-on-the-moon hypothesis: Why would a pig desire to go to the moon? Again, human standards are being imposed on non-human motivations.

When one studies fascism, one discerns a singular central motivation determining all facets of a society. The motivator, or dictator, decrees his personal standards as superior, against which all are compared. The diversity of motivations that allows a creation to exist are thus fought against with the utmost bitterness and vengeance. An inferior creature or system should not impede progress, as continual growth is required, so it must be eliminated. Do not take the notion of superiority so lightly, for the tales of tragedy are too many to tell.

Excellent indeed is this model of propaganda which Thorn

so eagerly presents for our consumption. A simple, palatable generalization followed by a string of seemingly sensible yet frivolous examples.

Regarding his polio-ridden-orca hypothesis: Orcas don't get polio. Do we develop cures for diseases that afflict animals we don't use? Were an orca to suffer some orca-related affliction perhaps, philosophically, it would be prepared to accept it, rather than cower in fear at the prospect of its own demise.

Regarding his animals-would-destroy-the-world-if-they-could hypothesis: A natural balance of prey and predator has evolved from the dawn of creation. Humans are the first creatures to be able to organize and mechanize to such an extent as to roll back that balance in their favor. Thus, certain species (including humans) are left without predators and are unchecked in their consumption and propagation. The mechanization of human society has allowed sustainable overpopulation relative to local resources. This is not a tenable position in the long term. The intellectual forces that allow humankind to isolate itself from the unpredictable and indifferent force of nature are merely a dam over which the reservoir of imbalance will inevitably flow.

I agree that the human intellect is an amazing force both complementary to, and in opposition with, the natural force with which it interacts. However, I am more interested in exploring my own awareness than in applying manipulative intelligence.

Phrases such as "All life forms are equal" and "Humans are superior to all other forms of life" are symptomatic of the trend in the United States in which the short attention span attempts to encompass vastly complicated issues with a single generalization. It's fun! It's easy! A short, simplistic platitude that rings in the mind, harmonizing with the chords of a simpler intellect.

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