

Center at New School University. “The hallmark of totalitarianism, a form of rule *supported* by uprooted masses who ironically and also tragically sought a world in which they would enjoy public recognition, was the appearance of what [she] called ‘radical’ and ‘absolute’ evil.” “Difficult as it is to conceive of an absolute [radical] evil even in the face of its factual existence,” Arendt wrote, “it seems to be closely connected with the invention of a system in which all men are equally superfluous,” including even, in their own fanatical minds, the “totalitarian murderers” themselves. Carrying out their logic of total domination, they aimed to transform human nature itself.

A theme that runs through all of Arendt’s thinking, says Bernstein, is the opposition between historical necessity and political freedom: “Totalitarianism is not something that *had to happen*. She rightly abhorred any suggestion that somehow it was the *inevitable* consequence of the Enlightenment, the history of metaphysics,

the nature of Western rationalism, modern bureaucracy, or modern technology. Like any disastrous contingent political event, it might have been prevented if individuals had collectively assumed the political responsibility for combating it.”

Arendt did not imagine that the totalitarian danger would pass with the demise of the Soviet Union. “Perhaps the most grim, disturbing, but realistic sentence in the entire book,” writes Bernstein, “comes near its conclusion, when she says, ‘Totalitarian solutions may well survive the fall of totalitarian regimes in the form of strong temptations which will come up whenever it seems impossible to alleviate political, social, or economic misery in a manner worthy of man.’”

“Anyone who has lived through the uses of terror and torture, the massacres, genocides, and ‘ethnic cleansings’ that have occurred all over the world during the past few decades,” adds Bernstein, “is painfully aware of how strong and ever present these temptations are.”

Prostitution and Freedom

“Prostitution and Sexual Autonomy: Making Sense of the Prohibition of Prostitution” by Scott A. Anderson, in *Ethics* (July 2002), Department of Philosophy, Northwestern University, 1818 Hinman Ave., Evanston, Ill. 60208–1315.

Is prostitution “just another recreation-oriented service industry?” Proponents of legalizing sex-work in the United States say it is. Working outside the law, prostitutes have few legal protections and no right to unionize. Making sex-work criminal reinforces what philosopher Martha Nussbaum, of the University of Chicago, believes to be “an unjust prejudice of the sort that once denigrated the activities of women actors, dancers, and singers.”

Allowing prostitution might even be a social good, advocates contend. The freedom to use one’s body as one wishes seems a basic right. And it gives everyone at least some fall-back employment. Prostitution might gain public esteem as what City University of New York philosopher Sybil Schwarzenbach calls “erotic therapy,” and allow the sex worker to “be respected for her

wealth of sexual and emotional knowledge.”

Three kinds of arguments are usually made against legalization. One is based on traditional morality. A second asserts that prostitution spawns crime and disease. Finally, many feminists argue that prostitution furthers the degradation and subordination of women.

Anderson, a visiting professor of philosophy at the State University of New York at Albany, makes a fourth case. Sex for pay should be illegal, he asserts, because the chance to sell sex impinges on the seller’s freedom—what he calls her right to “sexual autonomy.” “If sexual autonomy means anything, it means that sex does not become a necessary means for a person to avoid violence, brute force, or severe economic or other hardships.” Recognizing sexual autonomy, in other words, requires barring any interchange between the bedroom and the



Is this autonomy? Prostitution in Amsterdam's red light district is both legal and highly visible.

marketplace. Sex cannot be “just another use of the body.”

If society does not acknowledge sexual autonomy and legalizes prostitution, he asks, what's to prevent an increase of pressure to provide “unwanted sex”? Imagine the eerie results. Would schools offer vocational training in sex-work? Might welfare-to-work programs demand that clients consid-

er prostitution as employment?

Legalized prostitution exists under tightly restricted conditions in a few places in Europe and elsewhere. But Anderson does not see how it advances sexual equality. Commerce, built on openness and mutual agreement, will always be at odds with intimate matters of sex, ever founded on privacy and self-determination.

How Many Muslims?

“The Muslim Population of the United States: The Methodology of Estimates” by Tom W. Smith, in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Fall 2002), Journals Fulfillment Dept., Univ. of Chicago Press, P.O. Box 37005, Chicago, Ill. 60637.

How many Muslims live in the United States? The news media have reported many estimates—most of them vastly inflated, according to Smith, who is director of the General Social Survey at the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center. And the estimates have become more inflated since 9/11.

During the past year, news media reports have put the Muslim population at between five and eight million. These calculations average out to 6.7 million, or 2.4 percent of the U.S. population. But about half of these estimates come from Muslim organizations such as the Islamic Society of North America; most of the rest come from general reference works such as *The World Almanac*. Not one, Smith writes, is “based on

a scientifically sound or explicit methodology. . . . All can probably be characterized as guesses or assertions.”

Smith thinks the most reliable numbers come from public-opinion surveys in which people are asked about their religious affiliation. He cites 11 surveys conducted since 1998. Their results: Muslims make up between 0.2 and 0.6 percent of the U.S. population. Allowing for the fact that language barriers and other problems probably lead to an undercount of Muslims, Smith estimates that America's Muslim population might constitute as much as 0.67 percent of the population. That's only 1.9 million people, a far cry from the five to eight million routinely suggested in the nation's newspapers and TV news shows.