1-28-2000

Trends. Political Psychologies and the Welfare of Elian Gonzalez

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The controversy rages on over a 6-year-old Cuban boy who was rescued at sea after the fatal attempt of his mother and stepfather to reach the United States (US). Should he be returned to Cuba or remain in the US?

All rationales for the various opinions on this controversy are based on combinations of empiricism, experimentalism, reason, and belief—all generously imbued with conscious and unconscious motives and emotions. These rationales differ, however, on the weight afforded to putative decision-making criteria.

The largest set of rationales focuses on the child’s welfare and comprise criteria such as the potential for greater material well-being in the US, the alleged political superiority of US political values and systems, the amount of love and caring provided by various groupings of US or Cuban relatives and friends, and even the child’s own wishes.

A smaller set—but one greatly underemphasized—focuses on the political needs of others beyond the child and comprise making political points against the US or Cuba or securing political advantage through the vehicle of controversy.

The smallest set—the most underemphasized—focuses on the psychological needs of others beyond the child and comprises reliving familial dilemmas, resolving familial conflicts, engaging in narcissistic restitution, and compulsively experiencing and acting out the most primitive of phenomena involving sadomasochistic expression and the setting of self-other boundaries.