Ambi-Semitism

About the Libyan airliner tragedy, a local television newscaster commented: "Can you imagine what a fuss would have been made if an *Israeli* plane had been shot down by *Arabs?*"

Now this San Francisco newscaster, as it happens, is an unusually fine man. A compassionate fighter for human rights and peace, he is as repelled by anti-Semitism as he is by other forms of religious and racial hatred. And he is a notably intelligent man. Then how explain his breathtaking departure from reality when he suggests that more fuss has been raised about Arab violence against Israel, than about Israeli violence against Arabs? In what world? Not in his own TV station, certainly; nor in the United Nations, where the ratio of fuss per action has been about 40 to 1 against Israel.

Raab

Just take a typical example: 1967, when the Egyptian government announced that it was going to get rid of Israel, and proceeded to commit overt acts of war—blockading a vital Israeli port, dismissing the UN peace force, and massing troops. Israel said to the world: make a fuss, do something, prevent war. Did the world make a fuss, did the United States make a fuss, did the newscaster make a fuss? Nobody waggled a finger, Israel saved itself in the last hours remaining to it. And *then* there was a fuss— against Israel.

No, the record continues to be one of apathy towards the loss of Jewish life—at least, as much apathy as the world has had towards the loss of Arab life. So why did this newscaster make his strange statement?

There is this second implication in his statement. "The Jews really do, after all, control the mass media, and the U.S. government, and are therefore able to make or repress fuss." In the front of his intelligent, informed mind, our newscaster obviously knows better. What, then, goes on in the back of his mind?

One is tempted to call this a kind of subconscious racism. But the term is over-used and inexact. Our newscaster does not dislike Jews—and he would actively protest any violation of their civil rights. He is no anti-Semite—a word which calls up images of Lincoln Rockwell, Gerald L.K. Smith, and employers who won't hire Jews.

Perhaps we need another word, *ambi*-Semitism, to describe the state of mind of all those decent people who wouldn't harm a hair on a Jewish head, but who have a certain ambivalence about the Jews as a group. Ambi-Semitism would describe this ambivalence; and those liberals who are repelled by anti-Semitism, but who have some half-hidden resentment against Jews as a group. This resentment may have a variety of sources; the perceived "stiff-neckedness" of Jews who refuse to give up their separateness, which necessarily excludes other. Or, as Sartre suggested, the unbending morality of Judaism, which is the fountainhead of Western morality, and which so many people find stifling.

But whatever the source, the mark of the ambi-Semite is that he has some special need to catch the Jew out in moral error. This might seem like a compliment: "the Jew *should* be better than anyone else." Most often it is not a compliment at all, but some expression of ambi-Semitism.

A colleague of our newscaster is billed as the Middle East expert of that station, although he is mainly an expert in the pursuit of chic—in this case, the pursuit of Middle East chic. In disapproving of the Munich tragedy, this colleague emphasized that it demonstrated the desperation of the Palestinians; but, in disapproving of the Libyan airliner tragedy, he emphasized that it demonstrated a hard-line Israeli military stance.

Going out of the way to make such a perverted distinction is revealing. Everyone has properly avoided making the real moral distinction between the Libyan airliner tragedy and the Munich tragedy. Dwelling on such a distinction would seem an attempt to minimize the case of the Libyan airliner. The death of innocent people by manslaughter is as tragic as their death by murder, so the point is not that our newscaster did not try to make a distinction, which is understandable. The point is that he seemed to find some *special* release in being outraged at the Israeli, and, indeed, at American Jews. Such is the stuff of ambi-Semitism.