

## BARRICADES AGAINST THE SECOND WHY

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The thesis of this Thinksheet is (1) that enemies of critical reason & of reflective experience erect verbal barricades to prevent the asking of the second why, & (2) that "mystical-prophetic" thinking, teaching, preaching, and participation in public dialog require that the second why be pressed--for the penetration of taboos, the smashing of idols (Greek, "iconoclasm"), & the liberation of those oppressed by unexamined dogma & demagoguery. ...I use the abortion debate to illustrate this thesis.

1 "Careful!" "Why?" "The stove is hot." Why? At this stage of the conversation, our small child's parent may have run out of patience & cut the child off with "Never mind! Just be careful!" Or may stay relational: "Because I'm cooking." Or may go scientific: "Because the electricity/gas/wood has made it hot." A third "Why?" will freak out almost any parent, but this Thinksheet is only about the second why.

2 Now to our illustrative case, abortion. "Why do you want to have an abortion?" "Because I don't want to have a baby." "Why don't you want to have a baby?" In §1, our parent at this point had three choices. The pregnant has many more than that, including a none-of-your-business response.

Notice that the first exchange doesn't count: the response merely states what's implicit in the question. So the second "Why?" is, except verbally, the first....Now, if the conversation's initiator wants to continue, the second question will be something like "Do you think your reason for not wanting to have a baby but instead wanting to have an abortion is good enough?" To which the reply will be something like "Obviously so."

There the interchange may end, or proceed with "I agree" or "I think your reason's not good enough."

This may end it, or the initiative may pass to the other conversational partner: "Why do you think it not good enough?" "Because abortion is more serious than your treating it to be." "Why, how so?" The responder, instead of building a barricade against the second question, has permitted it & thus become confronted with the demand to argue,

### Abortion by any name is murder

I was interested in the Nov. 4th letter by Willis Elliott regarding sermonizing and science on the abortion issue. While his exercise in semantics was instructive from a linguistic standpoint, it was completely irrelevant with respect to the abortion issue.

Mr. Elliott says that "murder," "human life" and "baby" are social words and that it is preaching to call abortion murder because society has approved abortion.

First, I would remind him that it is the Supreme Court that approved abortion -- not society. And contrary to what he may wish, we still operate under a representative form of government, not an oligarchy.

Second, the issue is not the definition of the term "murder." We are talking about actions, not words. This issue is the destruction of what many of us call "life." The pro-abortionists may prefer some other term but we all know what we are talking about.

If the "baby" (zygote, embryo, fertilized egg, fetus) doesn't possess "life" (animus, soul, being) from the moment of conception, just when does it get it? And you know what "it" is. "It" is whatever you have or whatever Molly Yard has that makes taking "it" a crime.

Even someone like me, though, can understand why the anti-lifers can't or won't allow abortion to be called murder. It wouldn't play in Peoria now, would it? Who wants to be called pro-murder? And why in Nazi Germany they called it the Final Solution. "Murder" is such a difficult word, you know.

THOMAS F. TIMLIN  
Sandwich

### Claims the Bible is anti-abortion

In his Nov. 4 letter, "Sermons, Science on Abortion Issue," Willis Elliott is quite correct in pointing out to Jean Suzio and us that the word "baby" is a social word, its use dependent upon social intention. It is very much like the word "enemy," an individual whom society may kill without rippling its conscience.

A government may define as enemy the uniformed, armed representatives of a nation by which it has been attacked. Or the enemy could be those innocents who mean no harm such as a political minority within one's own borders, or an entire race of people on the European continent, or even unborn children -- human society's quintessential innocents.

Once the government has declared them to be the enemy, their lives can legally and even righteously be taken. Society indeed has the right to define "baby" or "enemy" because they are both social words.

However, in defense of Ms. Suzio, I must take exception to Mr. Elliott's use of the word "preacher," which is neither a social nor scientific word but a theological term. Historically defined, a preacher is one who speaks God's Word to people and is to be differentiated from a humanistic lecturer who speaks his own ideas to people.

A preacher, like an ambassador, does not make policy but is only a messenger. Consequently, in her preaching, Ms. Suzio cannot be faulted by Mr. Elliott because theologically, she was standing on solid ground. The message of the Bible is clearly anti-abortion, and there is nothing Mr. Elliott can do to change that.

He is, of course, free to disagree with the message of Holy Writ, but his argument is then with its author and not with Ms. Suzio.

PAUL T. CHAMBERLIN  
Chatham

rationally, relative degrees of seriousness. To prevent the second why that led to this confrontation, the responder could have erected a barricade: "Your reason is not good enough because abortion is murder, & there's no such thing as a good reason for **murder**"; or "Do you really think there can be such a thing as a reason good enough to kill your own unborn **baby**?"

3 As you can see, these two letterwriters are trying to protect the barricade words "murder" & "baby" against my sociolinguistic attack (CCT letter 4 Nov 89; their letters seven days later). Here's most of my unprinted response, titled "Bible not against abortion": The two letters "illustrate what worried me into writing this letter:

"1. **Semantic self-deception**....Timlin accepts my distinction between objective words (eg, 'rock') and social words (eg, 'baby' and 'murder'). But then, forgetting his concession, he reverts to semantic unawareness.

"Says he, 'We are talking about actions, not words' when it comes to 'murder.' For the language animal, that separation is impossible: human beings name everything, including actions. And he gives the name of 'murder' to the act of abortion. As if to underline his obscurity, he adds another social word, namely, 'crime,' to sanction his anti-abortion stance. But the fact is that abortion cannot honestly be called a "crime"--except in a rhetorical, preaching sense--in jurisdictions where it is legal. Eg, the USA.

"2. The **arrogant Bible-abuse** of those anti-abortionists who claim the Bible is on their side. In 'Claims the Bible is anti-abortion,'...Chamberlain says that in being pro-choice, I am anti-God, the 'author' of the anti-abortion 'message of Holy Writ.'

"The arrogance of that statement appalls me. Rivers of blood have been spilled by those convinced that God was on their side. By contrast, Abraham Lincoln, who prayed for a kinder, gentler nation, refused to say that God was on the North's side. 'Rather,' said he, 'it behooves us to inquire whether we are on God's side.'

"Mr. Chamberlain further disturbs me by narrowing 'preaching' down to 'speaking God's Word,' then circularly claiming that Ms. Suzio's anti-abortion utterance was 'on solid ground' because it was 'preaching'! Surely Mr. Chamberlain cannot believe that being a preacher guarantees the truth of what you are preaching.

"Finally, this old Bible professor is anguished by the abuse of the Bible to condemn abortion. The Bible has nothing to say on the subject, with the single exception of a civil, not criminal, case of accidental abortion (Exodus 21)....it pains me to be alleged to be an enemy of the Bible."

4 "The Bible says...." gets used both to teach the content of Scripture (a warranted, admirable use) & to shut off debate, to build a **biblical barricade** against the second why. Anyone attacking the barricade may be struck by stones (verses!) ripped out of the barricade.

This unwarranted, reason-&-experience-defying use of the Bible is often given the false legitimation of authoritarian, scribistic syllogisms, such as:

The Bible is against abortion.

God is the "author" of the Bible.

Therefore, to be for abortion is to be against God.

5 Life must go on & must not be too impeded by thought (as was the millipede that, asked to count its feet, gave up walking). Superficial and sick societies have an overload of taboos, of barricades against the second why. But it's sick, & crazy as well, when a society becomes so permissive, so taboo-free, as to lose its values-coherence (on which see many recent & upcoming U.S. Supreme Court cases, eg on pornography).

The Bible itself has some powerful anti-second-why barricades. The OT (not the NT) has un/clean foods & im/pure customs & laws. Take this conversation, on OT: "A menstruating woman is to be isolated." "Why?" "Because menstrual blood is unclean, impure." "Why?" "It just is": NO SECOND WHY. In the world of my childhood & youth, sex outside of marriage was dirty, unclean, impure, & thus out of the will of God. Came the revolution, & all sex was clean & beautiful & even holy. Building verbal barricades is not always & everywhere a bad idea.