

Where are we? A trig locator of "positions"

As a thinker, everybody lives in a triangle which can be seen when the three dots are found & the three lines are drawn. Who sez? Let's you & I. Let's see what truth(s), if any, this surmise-hypothesis might tease out. If your instant reaction is that this Thinksheet isn't going anywhere that could be of any use to you, please suspend that presumption: you might teach yourself something (whether or not I do).

1 ONE point: how much do you know if you know only that much about a person's mind, convictional "position"? Almost nothing. But if the particular point is for you a hot button, you'll be tempted to add two dots & draw the three lines & have that person boxed (or rather triangulated) in. That's the way bias, prejudice, works. It doesn't wait to discover the other two dots (yes, or more: to keep it simple, I'm working in this Thinksheet with triangles).

TWO points: you know two dots (two opinions/convictions of a particular person) & draw a line between them. Now how much do you know? A little more, not much. Suppose the person is pro-choice & self-described as "born-again." You may guess wildly about a third dot, but to no avail.

THREE points: then, as the conversation continues (or by some other means), a third dot becomes clear--say, the person highly values the jurisprudential process (i.e., how society juggles order & fairness). If now you draw the remaining two lines, will you be able to write a paragraph sketching that person's mind, mental position among the positional options? Of course your ¶ may say more about you than about that person; but the lens that is you may see the person with some clarity if you've the knowledge & experience necessary....

2but we all have the **lens problem**: the reason you can't step outside your lens so as to see everything "out there" "as it really is," is that you *are* the lens you see through; & besides, your habitual ways of seeing further distort the incoming images.....THE TEN LENSES: Your Guide to Living & Working in a Multicultural World (Capital Books/02)* describes the metaphoric habitual lenses through which we see one another & the world. The book's purpose? To help us "correct" (an optical term for decreasing distortion by grinding & adding elements [most excellent camera lenses having nine elements]) for our innocent biases & not so innocent prejudices. Here they are: ASSIMILATIONIST (fit in, support the organization, be patriotic). COLORBLIND (see the individual--not race, color, ethnicity; all are equal). CULTURALCENTRIST (improve the welfare of your cultural group; cultural pride). ELITIST (upper-class superiority [family roots, wealth, social status]). INTEGRATIONIST (use laws to break down racial/cultural barriers; "Ebony and ivory live together on my piano keys--shouldn't we?"). MERITOCRATIST (no restrictions on competition; "Cream rises to the top"). MULTICULTURALIST (celebrate diversity, each group retaining language/customs/ideas; mixed salad). SECLUSIONIST ("Birds of a feather flock together"; the different groups should live & work apart, each protecting itself from the others). TRANSCENDENT ("There's really only one race--the human race"; race/ethnicity/nationality are [by the plan of God/the Universe] for human richness). VICTIM/CARETAKER ("We shall overcome"; historic victims [i.e., their descendants] deserve compensation--previous oppressions having lingering baneful effects).

3 This Thinksheet's title assumes that in conversation & other social interactions we can know where (& so who) we "are" positionally--some implications being that we therefore have better self-perception ("Know thyself," repent, improve), can communicate better (better knowing the other[s]), suffer less from misunderstandings, better "get the job done." In the dynamism of this interdefining, we're always at work--consciously or not--on the questions "Where & Who is God?" That's another triangle: you, I, God.

The subtitle? "Trig" of course is short for "trigonometric" (literally, Gk. for "measuring three angles" or points). Everything I've said so far is in the subtitle: "A trig[onometric] locator of 'positions'." Now let's go navy:

4 Did you know that till the 19th century, no ship at sea ever knew where it

was unless it could see the shore? N/S, yes: for several centuries, by sextant, pilots could know three points: horizon; elevation of sun by day, polestar by night (the sextant [Lat., "6th of circle"] measuring up from the horizon); &, of course, the ship's position. So much for north/south, which are physical absolutes. But how about E/W? That, too, would be a physical absolute if the earth were flat. But since the earth is round, an arbitrary line dividing east from west had to be chosen; & since those doing the choosing sang "Columbia rules the waves," London was the choice--actually, nearby Greenwich, which in 1884 became the world's "prime meridian" [strange feeling when I straddled it, one foot east & one west]. The more difficult problem was to invent a longitudinal measuring-device, which turned out to be far more complex than the simple latitudinal sextant.

ANALOGY? The three E/W points are Greenwich, the ship's N/S sextant-determined position, & the ship's E/W position--the toughest point to find. So, I'm saying, in locating somebody's position, the third dot is the hardest to find; & it must fight off the temptation to jump to conclusions based on the first two dots. (What applies to ships applies also to airships, i.e. planes. And now we have the technologically most difficult third dot: satellites! We've always had, on the front of our heads, two points that can find any third point [& sense its distance, just as do your camera's rangefinder, & distance-finding surveying & astronomy instruments].)

5 In wonderful ways awesome to contemplate, our eyes & ears--both with trig power--are two dual points (viz., sight & sound) for perceiving **the third point** &, by metaphoric power, *conceiving* it ("getting the point," "making a point," & even "finding the Point" who made us [audiovideotheology through sound-images [[language]] & sight-images [[*"seen"* as signs]]). And as things can go wrong with the anatomy & physiology of seeing & hearing, so also with the invisible & metaphoric parallels.

6 Now let's apply the above to an article refused by the CHRISTIAN CENTURY (& privately distributed to a few readers). Long-eminent scholar Walter W. Benjamin details why he's not renewing his subscription. Steadily losing ground (now only 25,000 subscribers, 1/8th that of CHRISTIANITY TODAY), the CENTURY "is manifesting the behavior of a sect....[culturally] alienated....denouncing more than it affirms. Using trig analysis, here's what I come up with in reviewing "New Century--But Still the Same 'Old' CENTURY?" The CENTURY believes:

Point ONE: **Physical force is evil.** The CENTURY has been & is pacifist; persuasion is the cure for terrorism. No respect for such wisdom as Franklin's: "If you make yourself sheep, the wolves will eat you" & Niebuhr's Christian realism.

Point TWO: **Nobody here but just us equals.** Overuse of moral equivalency (what's wrong with us, that they hate us?). Multicultural/multinational: no patriotism. No retributive justice, only social/restorative. Love & justice, softened.

Point THREE: **God is love, & people are basically good.** "Evil" is too harsh a word to use against anybody or any government.

Given the first two points, would you be able to find the third--or is it too long a stretch? Point One moralizes into irrelevance. Point Two "justifies the ways of God to men" by claiming we're all made equal (massive data to the contrary!) or at least are worthy of equal treatment (more than equity?). Both assertions in Point Three are implied in the CENTURY's "liberalism" (the author's "position"--assignment to this mainline publication which "will continue its journey to the sideline").

7 I've been a CENTURY reader since the early 1930s, had conversations with its 1900 re-editor (C.C.Morrison), & am not about to drop my subscription. But I believe none of the three points Benjamin is attacking (not even that "God is love" when read as a virtually reversible proposition). And I could show, should show, that all three points (1) are overextensions of Christian truths & (2) have suspiciously close Christ-as-culture secular parallels.

To advert to this Thinksheet's title, Where am I? What is my trig "position"? I was going to tell you, but I've run out of space. Seriously, I don't want to divert your attention from asking yourself where *you* are.