

What you focus on is where you are.

Longtime readers of my Thinksheets know that one of the major topics I pay attention to is the psychology of **attention**. I hope they can abide both a continuation of that topic & my adverting to several thematic concerns they'll also recognize....I promise no mere repetitions!

1 My kindergarten teacher said to me (I suppose with a kindly tone, I can't remember), "Pay **attention** when I call your name!" When she reported to my mother her fear that I was afflicted with ADD (though at that time it probably wasn't called Attention Deficit Disorder), Mama suggested that Teach stop calling me "Willis," a name I'd never heard anywhere. Could that childhood experience be the bud of my ASS (Attention Surplus Strength)?

2 As for **focus**, I can never see or hear the word without a warm feeling from my long interest in photography & in the physics & mechanics of light. Before the present "moron cameras" (that do almost all the work for you), we shutter-bugs had to calculate (or read charts on) the distance / aperture (focal depth) ratio--as is still done in art photography. Focal depth? Shallow if you want to emphasize, say, a dog's nose; deep if, as in photos of record, you want everything in focus. Focus on focus!

Your physical eye must be in the viewfinder, but your imaginal eye must be at your focalpoint: "you" are both places at once! This Thinksheet is about your being where your imaginal eye is.

3 Every good photo is seen before it is taken & would not be taken had it not been first seen so that after being taken it can be privately or publicly seen: **vision** precedes action, record, & benefit. I still enjoy the '44-'45 yearbook of a college where I was photographer (as well as religion-&-philosophy professor): I see the results of my eye having foreseen what appears in the yearbook. I was "in" those photos before I took them & they got "into" the yearbook (though my image is in few of them). We Christians are already "in" the coming kingdom-reign-rule of God as we pray the Lord's Prayer, through which we daily focus on "your will be done on earth as it is [done] in heaven."

4 Another personal reference (for which I ask no pardon!) vis-a-vis focus: since my age-14 surgery on both eyes, I've worn trifocals; my eyeballs were early old, frozen into focal dysflexibility. For me, focusing is more conscious a process than it is for normals, whose optical muscles unconsciously change, appropriately, the shape of the eyeballs.

5 An occupational reference: when I went to seminary, I "had" (as two centuries ago was required) Hebrew, Greek, Latin, & German. This linguistic discipline trains one in acute focusing on **linguistic details** with one's physical & imaginal eyes. (Today, in devotional reading, I came upon Ps.30.12: God has "torn off my sackcloth [of mourning] and clothed me with joy." In the Hebrew the wordplay is luminous & delicious, & with praise & joy I paid **attention** to every detail. I was where my (imaginal) focus was: God was clothing me with joy.)

6 In this letter published today, my last two words are "encouraging debate," which requires **multi-focal** skill. Each side says "See it (look at it, think of it) my way." Ideologs have frozen eyeballs, unable to focus on other than their commitments. Liberals can't "see" me on the

Present both sides in death-penalty debate

On Dec. 27, your banner headline announced somebody killed seven of his co-workers. The same day, your editorial said, in effect, that his own life should not be forfeit: no capital punishment.

Against the death penalty, you argue that we have "an imperfect system" of punishment. Will you favor capital punishment when our system becomes perfect? A long wait.

You say "the biases of prosecutors" condemn capital punishment. Truly put, that is an argument against all forms of punishment, not just one.

You say in Massachusetts, three innocents were executed. The countervailing fact is that during that same period, scores of innocents were murdered by released murderers.

You say the death penalty is not an effective deterrent to murder. You do not mention the 100 percent effectiveness of capital punishment in preventing the murder of innocents by recidivists.

You say that African Americans are more in danger of execution than are white. Again, this really argues against all forms of punishment, not just one.

Against the death penalty, you quote a lawyer who fears reinstituting the death penalty in our state would clog up "the already overburdened court system." But unclogging the court system is another issue, a task urgently needing doing whatever is done about capital punishment.

I can't fault editorial writers for taking a position and adducing such arguments as support it. But the public has a greater need for help in coolly pondering hot-button issues. That need is better served by presenting both sides and encouraging debate.

WILLIS ELLIOTT
Craigville

Willis Elliott
Thinksheets

309 Lake Elizabeth Drive
Craigville, MA 02632
Phone/Fax 508.775.8008 \$20 per year
e-mail wandlelliott@aol.com

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death penalty, & conservatives can't "see" me on abortion. Why do I so frequently write on these two topics? Not only because of their inherent importance but also because they of all present public topics best occasion my commenting on the **pathology** of attention--or, to stay with the dominant metaphor of this Thinksheet, the narrow-close focus (Gk., "my-opia"), unwilling-unable to see "the wider picture" with all the relevant factors. (Yes, the opposite pathology is farsightedness; a "generous orthodoxy" illustrates flexible near/far focusing.)

7 On capital punishment, most of my friends lack a sense of proportion. The house burns down while they are guarding the outhouse from arson. Their narrow focus on the accused ("criminal's rights") needs balance from the abused ("victim's rights"). The fact, plain for all to see, is that more people are murdered by released murderers than there are prisoners convicted of murder. And if all convicted of murder were executed, only a very few innocents would die--in contrast to the hundreds of innocents who die by the hand of released convicted murderers. The attentional-analytic question is this: Why is all the horror expended on the few innocent victims, with none left for the many? Why, I repeat, this failure of the sense of proportion? Why this immoral, unjust narrowing of concern to protect the innocent all the way down from many actual victims to a few possible victims?

Here's a start on why. While logic and law see the forest (e.g., "all equal before the law"), rhetoric and drama see a tree (i.e., an individual sentenced to death). Second, immediacy: the death-sentenced individual is visible, his potential victims if he's released are invisible. Third, religion: Bible & Talmud say how you treat one human being is how you treat all human beings & God--&, again, the prisoner is the bird-in-hand, the case in point.

8 Hitler's first victim was murdered, the rest were state-processed: animal or human, killers find killing again easier. That's why an animal that has killed a human being is immediately killed,* a wisdom applicable (according to Gn.9.5-6) also to human animals. Yes, you've heard me before on this passage, but I have more to say. Here's the more: * Ex.21.28.

(1) In the Bible, the Hebrew phrase "image of God" in humanity occurs only in Gn.1.26,27; 9.6 (somebody a "cutout" of somebody else). (Humanity in "likeness" [resemblance] to God, only once: Gn.1.26.) After the creation story, Gn.9.6 is the only use of this "image" idea in the OT!** That alone should move us to pay close attention to this verse. In the NT, only males are in God's image (1Cor.11.7, a possible reading also of the Gn. passages). In future, believers are to be in the divine image (1Cor.15.49; & Christ bears God's image: 2Cor.4.4; Col.1.15--this exhausts the NT's references).

CANONICAL CONCLUSION: Our being in God's image is a very minor biblical theme which--like a too-weak clothespeg--cannot stand the weight Enlightenment & modern interpretation have put upon it.

(2) In Gn.9.6, where's the focus? Note here I'm using the other meaning of "focus" (the one the Camb.Dict.Am.Eng. headwords **center** ("the central point of...attention or interest" [I add: in photography, the "frame"]; not headword **science** ["focal point," this Thinksheet's previous usage]). It's on God's image in the victim. The victimizer, whether animal or human, is not here seen as bearing the image of God.*** This focus is universally applicable, coming even before the word "covenant" with Noah. A fraudulent refocusing is now common (&, in his THE GOSPEL OF LIFE, even the present pope is guilty of it): shift the spotlight from victim to victimizer, who is said to have dignity as a bearer of God's image--as though that image were indelible (an ontological extension overburdening the "image" peg; the "image" itself is only an image, a metaphor).

(3) But it's not fraudulent to turn the image inward as an incentive to piety & goodness (Avot 3.18): "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of God; but it was by special love that it was made known to him that he was created in the image of God"--a special dignity + consciousness thereof. Mind (consciousness), said Descartes, is *res intensa* (on which see, again, this Thinksheet's title), "intense"--internal focus; all else is *res extensa*, "the world" (he called it). Thus far Descartes with his blessings & burdens.