

THINKING FROM, AGAINST, FOR

Whatever account one gives of how it came to be, the human mind (**consciousness**) is wondrously made. You can once again be convinced of that if with me now you look at that sentence with philosophical eyes. Any "account" will be a process, story-telling your origin-theory ("how"), which tries to make sense by setting in order (cosmology) what is (ontology): ontology is the study of **what is**, cosmology is the study of **how what is is**. Those two disciplines are about BEING....Of this Thinksheet's first sentence, the second clause makes a value-claim: thinking about our mind, which as we're aware of it we call our consciousness, we are awed with wonder-order/chaos-beauty. Philosophers call this esthetics (technical meaning). In this valuing vein, we have a sense of what's right/wrong, good/bad, in human behavior. Philosophers call this ethics. Those two disciplines are about VALUING....Now, as we contemplate being & valuing, what's going on in our mind-consciousness? How do we know what we claim to know? When philosophers study that, they call their study epistemology. And when they look at themselves thinking about how they know, they see underneath the question how they/we think. You can see, from its title, that this Thinksheet is about that discipline, which philosophers call logic. This Thinksheet is about a particular pattern (Gestalt) of how we human beings think. On the hoof, almost always more than one of these patterns (Gestalten) are in action in the moment of thought. Almost never absent, e.g., is the running back & forth between the particular (item) & the general (category), the concrete & the abstract.

If you're still with me, let's look trialogically at the current **abortion** debate:

1 To lighten up & enlighten, let's think of the 12" ruler we all learned to work with not long after kindergarten. Let's let the middle, the 6" mark, represent thinking from. Some things seem so certain that you haven't enough question to view them as assumptions. When you rise from bed in the morning, you don't assume that gravity will prevent your continuing to rise, to go on up & hit the ceiling. You don't assume that, you *know* it. And so far are you from being aware that you know it that you'd consider it a dumb joke if anyone--say a philosopher!--were to point out that you know it. If somebody says something you think too obvious to mention, that something is for you a certainty you think from (not against or for).

2 Almost all human thought is like that, unconscious, thinking without thinking at all.* It's thinking from what's basic, on the basis of (a metaphor from on the base of). It's being, in one's mind, "grounded" (a metaphor from on the ground, the body's walking being the visible of what the mind invisibly does). We call this thinking **traditional** (as it's undisturbed by change-challenges) & **conservative** (as it conserves, prevents erosion of, "how it's always been")....*Did you notice the prejudice? Nontraditional thinkers think traditional thinkers don't think! To put it another way, nontraditional thinkers think thinking is consciously moving your mind against or for something. Secularists who've told me they "never think about God"--against or for deity--are, in their subculture, traditionalists: I'm tempted to accuse them, in their unconscious assumption of atheism, of not thinking at all.

3 Back to our school-ruler. If the 6" mark represents thinking from (either by traditional assumption or by "a settled conviction based upon clear reasoning and revelation"), what do the 1" mark & the 12" mark represent? Let's let the 1" be thinking AGAINST the 6" (as though saying "There's no truth in 6"!") & the 12" be thinking FOR the 6" (as though saying "The 6" is so true that I'm going to push it in your face!").

4 But there is something to the charge that assumptions we think *from* are thoughtless in the sense that we don't think *about* them till challenged to do so. P1 of today's CAPE COD TIMES reports that a school here, challenged by a Christian parent to drop the "Blue Devils" as their sports teams' name (something nobody had thought about for 47 years, it was said), decided to support the name as "a secular mascot." As the committee member who motioned to keep name & logo put it, "These days we don't have much tradition to hold on to." (Notice: A 12" move

to support 6" against a 1" challenge--a challenge which, however, looked sustained when in the meeting a senior jock said "The devil makes you want to go out and win!"). The Christian parent had argued that the devil logo was pro-satanic whether or not there were satanists in the student body (as indeed there are in many USA public schools). He said the logo is, though unconsciously, anti-God, as "Webster" shows: the devil is "the chief evil spirit, foe of God." By using the word "secular," the committee (1) desacralized the name/logo & (2) moved the issue away from church-&-state complications. At meeting-end, the committee officially thanked the parent for "getting us to think about this and getting the kids involved."

5 Right now, there's an American consensus that our self-understanding, cohesion, & direction need **public conversations**, "civil conversation," on matters of consequence to us all. A teacher could lead a class in case-study of the "Blue Devils" incident, with the primary intention of teaching logic (how to think) & the secondary intention of involving the students in the religion/schools problem.

6 Compared with **abortion**, the "Blue Devils" case is trivial. But in case-method teaching, one moves from a cool-trivial to a hot-momentous issue (which abortion, at this cultural-historical moment, supremely is)....The 6" location represents the mixed traditions for/against abortion, before the issue's bubbling up enough to warrant Federal action. The 1" location is *Wade v. Roe*, the Supreme Court's qualified-permission decision: government at no level shall interfere with a pregnant's right to choose. The 12" position is the "pro-life" movement's denial that there's any such right, & effort to move the public & government toward prohibition. Reacting against these prohibitionists (led by the Roman Catholic Church), some (including me) have taken up a **new 1"** position: we are not just pro-choice (as the old 1") but pro-abortion, a position for which we adduce chiefly pragmatic arguments (as in my #2973, which I sent to the founder of a great Christian intellectual periodical, *FIRST THINGS*--Rich.Jn.Neuhaus).

7 In my accompanying letter to Neuhaus, I appealed for *FIRST THINGS* fairness on the abortion issue, on which it promotes the 12" position (i.e., prohibitionism) (1) as though it were the pre-Roe assumed "settled" 6" position & (2) to the exclusion of both the old & the new 1" positions. Because his reply does him honor for clarity, conviction, & civility, I feel free to quote from it: "Thank you for your....[#2973] on a different way of understanding 'pro-life.'" (That Thinksheet pleads for a wider-lens viewing: human life in the contexts of [1] all life & [2] the essential bio-supports for life--a sustainable biosphere. The human population may stabilize, or even slightly decline, after about doubling the present 6 billion, if no decline in contraception & abortion, both of which his church [Roman Catholic] officially denounces.) "It is not a matter of 'absolutism' [my expression was "absolute intransigence"] but of [& in §3, above, I've quoted the following words] "a settled conviction based upon clear reasoning and revelation." Here he makes no move I don't on some other matters, e.g. our religion's pronouns for God, make myself: he & I make claim to privileged knowledge--"revelation"--for which we do unembarrassed special pleading; & we make the further claim that in **thinking from** that base or ground, we exercise "clear reasoning."

8 Writes N., this revelation + clear reasoning "informs the position of *FIRST THINGS* on abortion." On this subject *FIRST THINGS* is, & has every right to be, a journal not for dialog but for dogma, not for discussion but for promotion of a quite particular POV (point of view). And he understands that I'd rather see FT as a **forum** on all present public issues on which Christian intellectuals differ, not excluding abortion. He continues: "What we have here is not a conflict between 'absolute certainty' and open-mindedness. [I rejoin: Why would anyone be closed-minded about anything uncertain & therefore debatable?] We have a disagreement, which is not the end of but the reason for [& here's a phrase I used in §5, above] civil conversation." In our church we have "Conversations of Consequence" in both senses of "civil": on civic issues, & with civil tongues in our heads. These are **tri-logs**: we think from/against/for, in hope the Holy Spirit will oversee & guide us. The Roman magisterium encourages thinking from & for, & discourages thinking against, its pronouncements. On abortion-conversation, N. & I "have a disagreement."