

THE ROLE OF COERCION IN THE JUST ORDERING OF LIFE

Indubitably, coercion has no role in justification. God, rather than force assent, would rather die (& we Christians say, in the atonement, did). Again it's beyond doubt that most of the justice in the common life is "in place," exists, more by persuasion than by coercion: life is lived mainly within limits, far less against limits--& coercion exists existentially only in against-limits situations, ie only when a person or persons want to violate, overstep, transgress limits.....For this Thinksheet the illustrative case is the pre-publication position of a media figure who's asked me to help him, by commentation, to refine his position. I do so (herewith) interrogatively, criticizing a position for which I have great sympathy, though it is not quite mine. So here's his....

Proposal: That government be as abortion-neutral (neither promoting it nor interfering with it) as it is religion-neutral; & indeed that it be so because abortion convictions are religiously grounded to such extent as to fall under First Amendment neutrality on religion.

1. While this position is not entirely new (it bumped around a bit during last summer's Craigville Theological Colloquy on abortion), the aforesaid media person is the first person I've encountered who's trying to "make a Federal case" of it, defend it with might-&-main seriousness.

2. His position collapses if abortion is declared, in debate/decision, to be a moral-ethical rather than a religious issue. The American (Roman) Catholic Conference of bishops takes this position, arguing that abortion, as under "natural law" rather than (special) revelation, is in the public domain, & consequently can't be swept aside as religious & therefore private-sphere only. Here Mr. Media (I'll call him), a Catholic, is at odds with the national magisterium of his church--as I am, but I hold that the American way of government does not incorporate (as ACLU & PAW claim) an absolute "wall of separation" between church & state (an osmotic membrane is closer to the truth historically & in current codical law).

3. Everybody agrees that everybody has persuasion rights as to abortion, ie freedom to try to persuade fellow-citizen's to one's position. So the question is **Does government have any coercion responsibilities vis-a-vis abortion? or even rights?** If one answers yes, that's "D" on this chart:

The purposes of the chart are (1) to display the gray area of unclarity as to whether an issue is public (& therefore within the radius of government reach-responsibility-right), & (2) to facilitate conversation-debate. For this Thinksheet, let's quickly dispose of all but "D":

	the PUBLIC sphere	the GRAY area	the PRIVATE sphere
PERSUASION	A	C	E
COERCION	B	D	F

A is political oratory & propaganda, important in proportion as a government is democratic. A society that fails to foster oratory is, to that extent, ruled by bureaucrats & public-relations "handlers." Ours, eg. Or the USSR's....B is the enactment & enforcement of law in what is obviously the public sphere, eg taxes & the military draft....E is, eg, courtship, teaching the willing, & advertising....F is the pedagogy (parent-child, teacher-child) of the unwilling; assault & battery (bullying, battering); rape; murder....C is all persuasion efforts, from either side, that are challenged by the other side as to their legitimacy. Examples: (1) A Roman Catholic bishop asks his constituents not to vote for any pro-choice candidate; (2) Government at all levels spends hundreds of millions of dollars for mind-control, mind-bending, of the citizenry. Which brings us, at last, to....

4.D. Should government force children to go to school? to learn English? Should government "legislate morality" by prohibition of alcohol? nicotine? other drugs? pornography? prostitution? incest? public spitting? media profanity & blasphemy? deceptive plastic surgery (to conceal criminals)? driving without seatbelting? public nuisance (eg, loud parties disturbing the neighbors)? littering? homosexuality? abortion? In all these areas, what has justice to say, justice in the double sense of rectitude & fairness? But of course this Thinksheet centers on one of these areas,....

5.abortion. Mr. Media has courage & creativity in promoting his position, and

he achieves some clarity. Rightly, he rejects both "pro-life" & "pro-choice" as self-congratulatory delusions--since everybody's for both life & liberty. Arrogance blinds & throttles debate, civility oils it. He thinks to neuter the lexicon by "pro/anti-abortion." But as in chess, it's an advantage to have the first move, ie to be "pro-." Here I'm topdog speaking for underdog: I'm "pro-abortion." But again, "pro" means something you want. Do I want abortions? Of course not! What I want is no irresponsible pregnancies (whether wanted or not). But what do I get? Millions of (according to me) irresponsible conceptions. So now what do I do? Promote the abortion of irresponsibly conceived fetuses (or, if you prefer, "babies"; either way, we're talking about killing human beings without murdering them--unless, of course, government outlaws this type of killing: that would define it as a class of "murder").

6. Mr. Media says "It's a religious war, & in religious wars there are no winners." I have trouble with both his protasis & his apodosis: religion is inescapably involved in this public controversy (but isn't this true of most such?), but religions here are not lined up against each other; & I can't agree entirely that there are no winners in religious wars (which, eg, have cut up the global turf--eg, in 1947 & to the present, Hindus won India & Muslims, Pakistan). But it's certainly true that for millions of Americans it's a religious issue. In our town today, the two sides taunted each other from across Main St.--the one side saying "They think they have a corner on God" & the other praying "Lord, defeat Satan & stop the river of blood." Nor could it be said that it's a religious war on one side only: my church, & I, are on the side which today was publicly prayed against! Truth to tell, the battle of the adjectives (religious, moral-ethical) is a quibble, or what does "the gray area" (blending black & white) mean?

7. If government is to be "totally neutral" on abortion, as Mr. Media wants it to be, should our **public** (government?) **schools** mention it? First, is the PS in column #1 (government) or column #2 (the gray area)? Socalled "Christian schools" bypass the question, moving K-12 over into column #3 (private life, where religion is unimpeded by government). Secular humanists & the public-education establishment put the PS in column #1, out of the reach of religion & with minimal local control. I put in it column #2, & had a long conversation yesterday with a PS exec about fairness in sex ed & in religion. Mr. Media is not against all sex ed in the PS but wants abortion to go unmentioned--but is government sex-ed "totally neutral" if it fails to teach the full spread of visions & options, which I favor doing? Censoring out abortion because it's a hot public issue ("controversial") would have the same children-neglect status as doing the same with religion (a point I was making in yesterday's conversation)....Planned Parenthood has an excellent, balanced, full-spread pamphlet which our local schools aren't using because antiabortionists claim that using anything from PP promotes abortion--so the school system has produced its own material, with the spread but without "controversial" publisher.

8. Mr. Media says "All the money each side is using for propaganda should go into action funds"--the abortion side, to pay for abortions for the poor (so no government money goes into abortions); the no-abortion side, to support poor mothers & the children they decided not to abort (so that the no-abortion forces cannot be accused of irresponsibly abandoning children who would not have been born were it not for no-abortion influence). To me, the two-fund idea makes sense even though I'm not for government's being "totally neutral" on abortion, but only mainly neutral. Is government, now, "totally neutral" on conception, birth, & childcare? AFDC encourages sexual irresponsibility: teen boys have contests to see who can father the most children on the most girls; teen girls see who can have the first baby (& then in effect the government says "Have all you want, we'll pay you for them"). [Here I'm speaking from direct NYC contacts, not just through the media.].....Many teens, convinced not to abort, abandon their babies in hospitals: should not government have encouraged them to abort?....Mr. Media thinks the boys should be caught & saddled with \$ responsibility to those they sire: a fantastically impracticable though morally impeccable proposal....Hedonism, he & I say, increases misery & decreases humanness.

9. Mr. Media fails to mention **over-population**. What we're doing to God's good planet makes it, millions of times over, a sin not to abort. **Justice** is for the planet, too.