

THE SOPHISTS ARE STILL AT IT!

THE POLITICS OF SPEAKING A POSITIVE TO PROMOTE A NEGATIVE

Socrates scoffed at his rival street-philosophers as sycophants "making the worse appear the better part." It's an old trick in the bag of deliberate rhetorical confusion. My regular readers will suspect what I'm creeping up on but won't yet reveal.

1 "Gay" means (RHD²) "lightness of heart or liveliness of mood," a meaning now almost blotted out by the meaning overlay you see in, e.g., "gays & lesbians." A profound, deep sadness pervades the homosexual world, a sadness poorly concealed by personal & group efforts to be light of heart & lively of mood. This sophistry goes all the way back to the 17th c., when "gay" concealed two sadnesses, viz. prostitution & homosexuality. But this speaking a positive ("gay") to conceal a negative (the sadness of the non-straight life-style/world) has come to general public awareness only since gays have "come out" in numbers increasingly since WWII. This Thinksheet-title's "promote" I've here replaced with "conceal." What's concealed is the sadness, what's promoted by this deceptive use of "gay" is homosexual behavior, the homosexual life-style, "gay rights." Am I against gay rights? I'm for social non-discrimination & legal redress of grievances. But defectives (homosexuals, the blind, etc.) are inherently unequal (not "otherwise abled" or any of the other sophistic euphemisms), & using the equality idea in "gay rights" can cripple politicians (e.g., Clinton in his gays-in-the-military lead-off issue) & churches (the UCC's pressure on churches to become "open & affirming" of homos is, at the present time, the strongest alienator of the national office from the churches).

2 "Pro-life" is a positive used to promote a negative, viz. denying pregnant the right to determine the issue (outcome) of their pregnancies. One aspect of the deception is its misdirectedness. The political pressure is focused on pregnant, but the rhetoric of the word is focused on the fetus. We all understand the reason for the displacement: pro-lifers want to occupy, in the public eye, "the high moral ground," which cannot be occupied by being negative. As this Thinksheet's pre-title has it, "the sophists are still at it!"

3 "Inclusive language" has, as its major political thrust, the promotion of exclusive language: "Thou shalt never refer to God or Jesus Christ using a male pronoun or noun."* This negative principle is ruthlessly used in recent UCC publications. Throwing in the feminine here & there (e.g., tacking Sarah onto Abraham) is the minor motive.

Here we see the same pattern of deception by misdirection as in the case of "pro-life." There, the target was pregnant, but the word directs attention to the fetus. Here, the target is the Bible-&-tradition's "patriarchal" language, but the word "inclusive" directs your attention to females. We have here a case of major censorship concealed (as communist literary apparatchiks were so good at) by affirmative wording. Here's the torque: (1) Radical feminism concludes that the Bible's language is exclusive of females; (2) The conclusion is that two negatives will make a positive: the Bible will be open to the "inclusion" of females if its exclusive language is excluded by censorship + rewriting; (3) The project of concealing the negative action, viz. censorship, is accomplished by the use of a positive adjective, viz. "inclusive"; (4) The rhetoric can now appeal to fairness: who in the UCC would be against excluding anybody? Result: The biblical God's way of wanting to be addressed--he, Lord, King, Father--is excluded. Effect: Those who continue to speak of the biblical God as he says he wants to be spoken of are excluded ("cut out of the game [excluded by inclusiveness]"--p.24, ON THE WAY, Wis.Conf.UCC/94).

* P.19 of ON THE WAY: Douglas Horton is right that those who say "I have no creeds" have a creed, "albeit of a negative variety." "The hymnal controversy last summer (at General Synod) was about the use of a negative creed, 'Thou shalt never refer to God or Jesus Christ using a male pronoun or noun.' The only definitive protection against such a mindless creed is an ancient one which has had

the advantage of historical perspective on its side.

4 The first step in the §3 torque--"Radical feminism concludes that the Bible's language is exclusive of women"--can be de-torqued thus: "Radical feminism does not like the way the Bible includes women." That the Bible includes women is a fact (in contrast, e.g., to Mithraic writings, which excluded women, who were excluded from the rites of the Mithrea [temples of Mithras]). Both Testaments present us with some strong, influential women & enjoin women's extensive participation in the life of the people of God. Women are thus included individually & communally. But because their divine hormonal assignment was/is to the private sphere, the Bible addresses them only indirectly (generically, e.g. "men" meaning "men & women") when it is a question of the public sphere, to which it is the males who have the divine hormonal assignment....Politicized philosophical egalitarianism is, presently, trying to outwit both the estrogens & the androgens. The baleful social results are piling up. No woman should be "kept in her place" (allowance should be made for individual women to be leaders in religion, politics, science, etc.); but biology has a place for women in general & a different place for men in general, & gender confusion in society is no less tragic than it is in the individual.

NOTES on the indirect (generic) inclusion of women: (1) The NRSV did right in removing all genericisms attributable not to the Bible's languages but to English; (2) In some cases, the NRSV did wrong in treating the specific (men being addressed) as though it were generic (people being addressed); (3) Because in our present society so many women have entered the public sphere, the generic (indirect) form of addressing them is inappropriate, unfair, even insulting; (4) The historical generic in literature should not be bowdlerized out, in the manner of the Inclusive Language Bible (which is, to use a phrase of Brevard Childs [BIBLICAL THEOLOGY, p.723], "subservient to ideology"). (Childs, p.75, notes that in the history of Bible transmission, reverence for the text prevented bowdlerization. E.g., "There was no attempt made to christianize the Old Testament through redactional changes....Rather the collection of Jewish scriptures was envisioned as closed." Thus note also that the four Gospels lie alongside one another, without the "redactional activity" of merging them [as, outside the NT, Tatian did in mid-2nd.-c.].)....The Bible includes women more than did the societies out of which it sprang, & less than the proper literature of our time & place. To try to rewrite the Bible to please our modern taste is pernicious, antihistorical meddling & should be (but in liberal church circles is not) denounced....The bowdlerizers argue that if we don't expurgate Scripture, its "sexism" will continue to pollute the church. I reply: The expurgation is itself pollution, pollution by negation & tendentious revisionism. When this surgery is performed not only on the Bible but also on historic liturgies & hymns & on theology & on homiletics, the church faces the emergence of an alien faith within its walls, a faith that may prove a killing cancer to the liberal church.

5 Now consider a *proper* use of "inclusive language": when the Bible says "God," it includes, by the theological principle of **divine cooptation**, rival gods & goddesses. Have a look at the process:

(1) YHWH **coopts**--absorbs assimilable characteristics of Canaanite El ("Power") figures--such deities as El, Elohim, El Shaddai, El Elyon. Ancient Hebrew montheism had powerful digestive juices. We are at liberty to conclude either that YHWH is just a god they made up from materials lying around in their supernatural world, or that God was gradually revealing himself in-through their history as by evolution he gradually produced us who are free to theorize about him: revelation was as psycho-organic as evolution was bio-organic. I find it easier to believe in long, messy, heuristic, probative processes than in instant creation (e.g., the current embarrassing "scientific creationism") or revelation (e.g., Athena springing mature & full-armed out of the head of Zeus).

(2) As the biblical deity ate rival gods, so also goddesses, who thus are included generically when we say "God": the divine feminine is **coopted**--absorbed into the divine masculine. E.g., "wisdom" in OT is feminine but in the NT masculine, Jesus having eaten her (e.g. 1Cor.1.24, a v. reminding us also of Yahweh's having eaten El). Some are trying to rescue the old gods & goddesses from the Christian God's guts, but its too late. Not too late, however, to give up on Christianity & return to paganism's gods & goddesses, as many are doing.