

Four centuries ago, somebody came up with "interpolate" to mean introjecting a new factor into a situation. A little more than two centuries later, somebody else replaced the prefix with "extra-" to produce a word meaning to extraject, project, extend, expand, infer, leap from known to unknown so as, by a trajectory of assumptions, to land, by inferences, on otherwise logically insupportable (ie, conjectural) conviction functioning for the extrapolater as knowledge.

Suppose you were to build a wall of stones, inflated blue balloons (interpolations), & inflated red balloons (extrapolations)--say, the three alternating throughout. And supposed you'd agreed to continue work till a balloon burst. You wouldn't be working long, would you? But in the invisible world, ideas do not break from weight, they have to be pricked; & only when they are pricked do ideological-philosophical-religious-scientific walls collapse.

The hubris of *apologetics* is the claim that my wall has no balloons: the hubris of *polemics* is the claim that your wall is nothing but balloons. Given the plumbing between the brain & the adrenal gland, & humanity's fallen proclivity to let passion swamp reason, truth-seeking dialog is improbable--so violence, mental & physical, is probable & to be viewed as natural.

I propose to illustrate with the cases of **war** & **sex**.

WAR

"How can you still believe in [the biblical] God when Christianity has been here 2,000 years & we're in history's bloodiest century?"

Though this question bristles with illogics as a porcupine with quills, I'm hearing it more & more in conversations & the electronic media, & increasingly seeing it in the print media. Almost never is it an inquiry: almost always it's an interrogative attack on my religion. How do you flip over a porcupine? Here are a few responses:

1 The question indirectly, & doubly, honors my religion. The first honor: my religion is antibloody. The second honor: my religion, more than any other, became so influential as to be blameable that violence has not been brought under control....I accept the first honor. I decline the second, for my religion has never become that influential.

2 The question exposes the Enlightenment assumption that the purpose of religion is to provide support-warrant-sanction for the progress of Man (sic) from the darkness of ignorance to the light (En-LIGHT-enment) of knowledge & thus of virtue, knowledge both being & entailing virtue. If that had been the purpose of my religion, its critics might indeed say that it's failed. But my religion has been off on another project, viz "the glory of God." It's stupid to accuse my religion of failing at something it hasn't tried to do!

3 The question assumes the nonexistence of (the biblical) God, then irrationally blames Christianity for not pacifying humanity. But my religion is two removes from guilty: (1) it makes no claim to anything without God; & (2) it specifically denies even the possibility of pacification without divine intervention (in the Lord's Prayer, "Your Kingdom-Rule-Reign come" as we hallow-honor Your name & live willing to forgive our fellows). The depth of the accuser's ignorance of my religion is clear in the diametrical: the case is the reverse of the accuser's perception: the case is that if pacification were to occur without my God, it would destroy my religion (which says shalom can come only through grateful-joyful submissions to God) & establish Enlightenment humanism.

4 The question misunderstands Jesus as "prince of peace" (Is.9.6) blessing "peacemakers" (Mt.5.9). Thinking atheistically instead of theistically in the biblical contexts, it reduces these two texts to a flat-world ethical generalization, viz that human beings should "make" (as "peacemakers") nonwar. But besides the atrocious, humanistically polluted hermeneutics, the accuser's claim here is utopian, skipping over the damning datum that human beings don't make what

they don't want & do make what they do want. The crushing weight of historical evidence is that human beings do want war & so make it, & when it's convenient do want peace & so make it. I'm being not cynical but realistic, in line with a power analysis of the human story & with Scripture's low view of humanity sans deity. But am I cutting the nerve of action? Not at all! I'm defining peace action as (1) within the biblical paradigm & (2) within the sphere of the devotee's responsibilities within that paradigm.

5 Mammals' violence increases with the increase of their numbers within their support-system (ie, space & resources). My century, this one, has seen the tripling of my species on a planet of steady size & declining quality (eg, most human beings do not have good drinking water). Ergo, we're probably looking at a steep increase in wars. This situation calls for radical new-think. But it's nothing to flap my religion. Quite the opposite.

6 My religion prefers nonviolence, thus diplomacy over war. But to say that it demands nonviolence reduces it from a religion to a politic.

SEX

"Since homosexuality is as natural as heterosexuality, the two should be treated as in all respects on a level playing field, with no more strictures on the former than on the latter."

The crux here, the key word, is "**natural**." The psychohistorical force is Stoic. Our current cultural crisis may be stated as a conflict between "living naturally" (the Stoic ideal being life *κἀτα φύσιν* "according to nature") & living obedient to "natural law" (Lactantius, Tertullian, Augustine, Aquinas--all thinking on an Aristotelian-Stoic base in biblical categories). Intelligent, honorable discussion of sex in today's West will proceed with this intellectual history on the table along with current scientific fact/opinion & "religious differences."

1 The earliest Christians concluded that what was against, rather than according to, nature is against God's will. Eg, homosexuality is proscribed as (Ro.1.26-27) *παρὰ φύσιν* "against nature," "unnatural," Vg. "contra naturam." Canonical (normative, classical) Christians cannot easily brush this aside. And it isn't as though there were factors in dispute, as in the case of abortion: living in the Hellenistic world, where homosexuality was common, Jews (Lev.18.22 [the next v. proscribes bestiality], 20.13 [the death penalty]) & Christians (our Ro. passage, 1Cor.6.9, 1Tim.1.10) unanimously condemned same-sex genital activity....In the same-sex chapter in his latest book, Wm. Sloan Coffin makes light of rejecting the Bible's proscription. Says he in effect, are we then to obey all the other Levitical laws? That version of the all-or-nothing fallacy he would not apply to the Decalog, questioning the other Commandments because we Christians do not observe the Sabbath (Saturday rest).

My church, the UCC, is officially "open & affirming" of homosexuals & their lifestyle. But if we are to take Scripture & Christian tradition & the ecumenical church seriously, the most we can be, in my opinion, is open: homosexuals may join the church & perhaps be ordained, but their "unnatural" lifestyle cannot be affirmed....

2anymore than can the pederast's lifestyle, which also was common & acceptable in the Hellenistic world & apparently is, as is homosexuality, natural, ie genetic or congenital.

Here we face a curious chiasmus: (1) the Bible does not condemn pederasty (lit., a man's sexual activity with a boy, a longtime practice--according to sister LaToya--of Michael Jackson), but it's condemned by "open & affirming" Christians; (2) the Bible, in both Testaments, does condemn homosexuality, but its condoned, even affirmed, by "open & affirming" Christians. Not that the early Christians approved of pederasty: the Church Fathers condemn pederasts.

But, given the evidence in recent trials of pederastic RC priests, pederasty is as natural as homosexuality. The point: from "naturalness," no valid extrapolations to behavior & social acceptance can be made.