

a figure to admire for fundamentalists. On the other hand, the theologians who deal with the decrepit World Council of Churches and perhaps fritter away the Church's heritage are widely (and justifiably) feared. The Catholic Church in America must decide. Does she

want ecumenical union with dying and heterodox denominations? Or does she wish to gain highly motivated converts? To do the latter she need only affirm orthodoxy, keep the historic faith, and act with charity toward the fundamentalists. ■

BEYOND THE LOCKEAN UNIVERSE

Vol 59 n. 8 Oct 92

Thomas Storck

The Superficiality of "Left" & "Right"

Terms give names to the concepts we have in our minds. And concepts, in turn, are, or ought to be, our internal mental comprehension of what actually exists in the world. When our concepts signify what truly exists, then our thinking can deal with things as they really are, surely the first requisite for intelligent and effective action. But when our concepts are not adequate comprehensions of reality, then our thinking and acting are necessarily based, at least in part, on illusions. When this happens the terms we employ to express what is in our minds will obviously also be confused and will generally make whatever we are discussing more, rather than less, obscure. Moreover, since most of us do not habitually ground our thinking in first principles, a confused set of terms is likely to hold the field unchallenged. And if the matter is an important one, the results of all this ambiguity are likely to be serious.

For example, when we use the term "unborn baby," we are giving expression to our mental grasp of the reality outside our minds, namely, that the fetus is truly a baby who simply happens to not yet be born. If, on the other hand, such terms as "product of conception" or "protoplasmic parasite" express what is in our minds, that would show that in this case we do not have an adequate grasp of reality.

There is another major area where the above confusion exists. This is in our political terminology, which hinders clear thought, and

makes coherent action difficult. The terms I refer to are those that classify all political and socio-economic positions along a unilinear spectrum from Right to Left, terms such as reactionary, conservative, moderate, liberal, and radical. These terms and the set of concepts that underlie them are not only illusory, but dangerous; they contribute, most notably, to the dichotomy that exists between those working for prolife and related causes and those working for economic justice. For instead of being the allies that they should be, these two movements too often view each other as, if not the enemy, at least in close alliance with the enemy. As a result, each of these causes is hindered in its work as well as intellectually discredited in the eyes of many.

It is almost universally assumed that political positions can be placed along a line from Right to Left. For example, those on the Right want the government to leave them alone to make money, but they want the authorities to watch closely everyone else's behavior in bed and what they are reading, listening to, and viewing. In foreign policy they want a big stick — speaking softly is regarded as wimpy. Those of the Left, on the other hand, want the state not just to leave them alone while they pursue their own private pleasures, but, if possible, to finance them as well and prevent anyone else from making them feel bad about their behavior or its consequences. Regarding economic activity they laudably see the injustices caused by the free market, but their remedy is a new bureaucracy with fancy initials. Regarding foreign affairs they show a commendable desire for restraint in military

Thomas Storck is a librarian in Washington, D.C.

ed articles read by hundreds, those millions who fully believe are longing for a popular defense of their views in the marketplace and confirmation of experiences of the miraculous in their own lives. Liberal Catholics decry the Church's stand on birth control while more and more fundamentalists come to accept the Church's position. Persons who used to view the Church as the "whore of Babylon" now march in her vanguard at prolife demonstrations. These persons are supernatural Christians, weak and confused on many issues, but orthodox in ways that many of the Church "modernizers" no longer are. They accept the Virgin Birth without question and believe Jesus rose bodily from the dead.

Why do they not become Catholic in increasing numbers? One reason is that the Church is often on the side of those who ridicule them. The further explanation is that the Church often seems to be hedging on the very positions that they view as the center of Christian life.

It is often thought that the chief problem is Catholic doctrine. Not really. Fundamentalist concerns about the Mass, the intercessory prayer of saints, and "tradition" have been effectively answered by such writers as Sheldon Vanauken and Thomas Howard. Their works, however, are not widely enough distributed in circles where thoughtful fundamentalists are likely to read them. Believers who can tenaciously hold to a 10,000-year-old earth because they believe that Scripture demands it are not going to be put off by any doctrine — if they can be convinced that the Faith demands that they accept it. Fundamentalists can be convinced by thoughtful argument that is not accompanied by derision.

Such arguments are sometimes made available, and still fundamentalists fail to convert. What, then, is their concern? They fear that if they join the Church, she will abandon orthodoxy right as they join. These fears are not groundless. They have seen mainline Protestant denominations fall to theological liberalism. They see "hip" bishops and nuns on television and think (wrongly) that the same sick signs that forced them to leave their grandparents' mainline Protestant church are also pervasive in the Church of Rome. This is their greatest fear. In choosing to follow the silver knight, John Paul II, they do not want to find that they have joined just before some doctrinal Waterloo.

How to win the fundamentalist millions to

the Church? The answer is to be more Catholic, to reaffirm the full-throated faith of Pius XII and not just the softer voice of John XXIII. Fundamentalists love to hear the great truths of the faith. They will have no trouble in the realm of belief, if they are ministered to with understanding. In the meantime, a defense of their views where they are right and a refusal to "pile on" with the secular media will do wonders.

John Cardinal O'Connor is the exemplar of how to deal with a fundamentalist. His refusal to compromise the faith (or, for that matter, the distinctives of Catholicism) has made him

The very groups and religious denominations that have shared so much of the struggle for "liberal" causes and with whom we [social action Catholics] have a long history of association are now openly and loudly advocating abortion rights and sexual freedom. The Episcopalians, the Methodists, the Presbyterians and others who have stood side by side with us in anti-war demonstrations and on picket lines for the United Farm Workers are now forming new alliances and adding their voice to a different vision of public policy. Institutionally we cannot join with them in their new pursuits.... So whom do we end up working with? Who, as it turns out, are our natural allies on sexual and family issues? The Evangelicals.... Some social action Catholics do not take kindly to these new arrangements.... The cultural disintegration that is taking place all around them seems not to affect their work.... Some find that they are more "liberal" than they are "Catholic".... On the other hand, there is a surprising number of Catholic social action offices that are staffed by people who accept the church's position on both family and sexual issues and the social justice agenda.... The movement toward more coalitions with Evangelicals is gathering steam.

*George A. Wesolek,
writing in America*

operations, but in their own way — culturally — they desire to Americanize the world just as much as the Right. And the Center? Depending on the particular mix of opinions held, it can consist of the worst or the best of both sides, but usually it will be in basic agreement with either the Right or the Left, but make major concessions to the other side in the name of compromise and moderation.

What do I object to in all this? Two things. First, this system of putting positions on a spectrum often puts together what do not logically belong together. Why, for example, are those who favor laws protecting the unborn also supposed to favor an unrestrained capitalism that ignores or exploits the weak? Actually the opposite ought to be true, for the logic for linking a *laissez-faire* approach to both commercial and sexual matters is pretty strong, as libertarians bear witness. The same is true, in an opposite way, concerning the Left. If one sees that intervention is necessary in economic affairs to safeguard the poor and working people, then it is assumed that one favors the legality of abortion and pornography. But there is no logical connection between these positions, in fact often the opposite.

My second objection is that we often classify at the same end of the spectrum positions that are actually opposed to one another. For example, the authoritarian regimes of the 1930s, such as Fascism in Italy and the governments of Franco in Spain and Salazar in Portugal, are considered to be on the Right. Yet the economic policies of these states, supposedly one of the key points in determining whether an ideology is left or right, were clearly unlike those of the libertarians or Reaganites. These regimes favored and practiced regulation of the economy, directly or via intermediate bodies, and, so they argued, for the sake of the common good. They did not accept, even in theory, the unregulated market or regard economics as outside political considerations. Whether or not the economic policies of Mussolini, Franco, or Salazar ever really served the poor and the working class, as their proponents claimed, is beside the point. What is important is that these governments' approach to economics regarded the state as one of the chief forces for good in the economy. Yet if the European authoritarian states and the Anglo-American free-marketeers are both of the Right, what consistent economic doctrine does the Right have?

More serious than this, though, is the fact

that some of the economic ideas of the New Deal, especially the National Industrial Recovery Act, used the same economic approach as did these European corporate statistes. Such proposals were widely denounced by what we call the Right in America as interference with the sacred right to do business as one pleases. How could these same ideas be right-wing in Europe and left-wing in the U.S.?

If, as is asserted, one can arrange positions on the spectrum by how much they reject governmental and other regulation of economic life, then where does one put Franco? The obvious place for him is among the Leftists who, like him, attempt to use government to order the economy for political purposes. And if one argues that despite rhetoric about social justice and the common good, Franco and those of a like mind favored the interests of the rich and did little or nothing for the poor, and thus they belong with Goldwater and Reagan, then we are no longer judging political theories but the results of their implementation or the sincerity of those who hold them. This is entirely different from positioning political ideas and theories; this involves questions of the prudence and effectiveness of practical measures and of the personal integrity of their promoters. Moreover, the same questions about sincerity and effectiveness can be asked of the masters of the Soviet regime and their allies, who were always placed on the Left, but did little for the poor and the working class.

If one considers modern papal social teaching, most recently embodied in John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus*, one sees another important body of social thought which cannot be easily placed on the spectrum. This tradition takes strong stands on a number of issues that would seem to place it well to the Left — e.g., the right of labor to organize and to receive a just wage, or the rejection of the free market as the leading force in the economy. Yet it affirms the right to private property as something peculiarly appropriate to man's nature. Where to place this teaching on the spectrum



has been a big problem for secular observers.

When William Jennings Bryan ran for president in 1896 he was considered a champion of the poor, the workers, and the exploited farmers — and correctly so. Later, after the Spanish-American War, he was a determined foe of American imperialism, and as Secretary of State under Wilson he worked to establish a system of treaties to reduce armaments and promote arbitration. But as a fundamentalist Protestant he opposed the teaching of evolution and supported Prohibition. Is he of the Right or the Left? Does his opposition to evolution, for example, make him of the Right, or does the fact that he saw in the theory of evolution a major intellectual justification for the social Darwinism that gave the rich clear consciences in their exploitation of the poor make him of the Left?

I have listed enough examples to show that our conventional grouping of people and positions does not correspond to reality, to the richness and variety of actual political positions. Yet it must be admitted that in some instances the conventional right/left spectrum does do an adequate job of classifying political figures and positions. For example, it seems to be the case that with regard to the important questions of regulation of or intervention in the economy, most conventional U.S. politicians and political viewpoints can be differentiated by degree, that is simply by the *amount* of regulation advocated, and placed along a spectrum without doing violence to anything important in their positions.

So what is going on here? Can anything be said that will make sense of both sets of facts? I think so. There is another way of classifying political positions that does justice to all the facts, both those that support the model of a unilinear spectrum and those that do not. It is as follows.

Our conventional notion of the spectrum considers that all positions can be differentiated merely by *degree* — i.e., every position is more to the Left or the Right and can be appropriately placed on a single line. However, this unilinear spectrum makes sense and corresponds with reality only within the framework of a broad philosophical position. The reason, for example, that it seems as if American political positions can be arranged according to their attitude toward government intervention in economic life is because all these positions are within the broad framework of the thought of John Locke. Locke was the consolidator of a tradition which at bottom

considers human society and the state to be convenient institutions entered into solely for the sake of temporal gain. He himself was quite explicit about this, writing, for example, in his (first) *Letter Concerning Toleration*:

The commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for procuring, preserving, and advancing their own civil interests.

Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like.

It is the duty of the civil magistrate, by the impartial execution of equal laws, to secure unto all the people...the just possession of these things.... If anyone presume to violate the laws of public justice and equity...his presumption is to be checked by the fear of punishment....

Depending on the material/temporal advantages sought and the means judged best to attain them, this tradition has given rise to great diversity in actual political positions. Considered in this way, Reagan is a right-Lockean, George McGovern a left-Lockean. Their differences are simply over how best to obtain and distribute various material goods. Essentially each of them wants a commonwealth where citizens play the game of obtaining desired material goods according to known and agreed upon rules, Locke's "laws of public justice and equity." Whether the goods played for are the economic rewards of the entrepreneur or the benefits from various government programs is really not important. Each side sees the purpose of society as simply to distribute these rewards.

Nearly all the political controversy in the U.S. since its founding has been between left- and right-Lockeans, a kind of family feud. As Stanley Hauerwas correctly wrote in the NOR's "Symposium on Transcending Ideological Conformity" (Oct. 1991):

I remain convinced by critics of classical liberalism that the Left and the Right in America are really brothers and sisters in spite of all their seeming disagreements. Both believe that good societies are those that try to achieve the freedom of the individual and then work for co-operation between

those individuals in spite of the fact that they share nothing in common other than their commitment to the freedom of the individual.

When someone of authentic Catholic principles enters such a political arena, he will find himself agreeing with the right-Lockeans on many things and with the left-Lockeans on many things, but sometimes disagreeing over means, sometimes over reasons, and of course often over ends with both sides. But the point is, such a Catholic simply cannot be placed on this right/left spectrum, the usefulness of which is limited to those of the same philosophical background. The failure of our political terminology is that it assumes all political discourse can be contained within the one Lockean tradition, because it knows nothing outside it.

But there are other traditions of political philosophy. One that is of the greatest importance is the Catholic tradition, though actually it is much older than the Church, having its beginnings in the thought of Plato and Aristotle. Since this tradition regards the human community and the state as natural, not artificial, and as existing for more than merely material advantages, its approach to a host of problems differs from the various approaches within the Lockean tradition. In fact, even when its proposals coincide with the proposals made within the Lockean tradition, most often the rationale behind them is not the same. And on the vexed question of the economy, the Catholic tradition favors neither the free market nor centralized governmental regulation (the two contrary Lockean positions). Instead it favors self-regulation via autonomous groups, such as the guilds of the Middle Ages or various kinds of co-operatives, which indeed produce an economy subordinate to the common good but accomplish this independently of direct governmental control.

Another tradition of political philosophy is the Marxist. Though almost all socialism is one or another form of state capitalism, with the disagreement with capitalism being merely over means, not ends, Marxism does take a different view of the origin of the state, finding it neither in a social contract, as in Locke, nor in the nature of man, as in Aristotle and the Catholic tradition, but in class antagonisms. It rejects the state as the necessary means for the harmonious existence of civil society, supposing that perfected men can live

without the state, yet still in society. Thus it finds the natural place of man to be in society but without any political apparatus, whereas Locke considered man's natural home to be outside both society and politics, and the Catholic tradition sees that both society and the state are according to human nature. Thus because of this major disagreement, Marxism is a separate tradition.

Now, given all this, are our present political terms and usage dangerous to Catholic political activity? As I said, if a Catholic looks at or takes part in political activity, at least in the U.S. and most English-speaking countries, he will find all political activity organized around a right/left Lockean perspective. People think of themselves as liberal, moderate, or conservative; they form alliances and appeal to voters based on such perceptions; political commentators present all of our political life as existing within such a Lockean universe. And for most conventional American politicians this is adequate, though they should be aware that their universe is only the Lockean universe, not the entire cosmos. But what does one do with something like the prolife movement? Is it of the Right or the Left? Since it defends the most elemental rights of a defenseless part of the population, the unborn, a grave issue of social justice, one would think that it was a cause of the Left. But it is linked in the perceptions of many with the Right because it opposes something considered necessary for sexual freedom by those on the libertine Left. So it looks for allies and spokesmen among those on the Right and unwittingly becomes even more linked with the entire right-wing program. But the prolife movement cannot really be classed on the American/Lockean spectrum, because it is not Lockean. It is not really interested in obtaining material benefits for anyone, as if it supported the right to life only of those who would grow up to be successful. Its concerns arise from an elemental recognition of injustice. But Catholics taking part in the prolife movement easily feel compelled to identify with either the Right or the Left, both because one obviously feels better working with allies and because the reigning conceptual framework urges them to consider themselves one or the other. We naturally classify people and things, and where our classifying tools are flawed and illusory we will usually, unless we think back to first principles, make flawed and illusory classifica-

tions.

This problem is equally real for those Catholics working in what we call leftist areas — e.g., for the poor, the homeless, Hispanic immigrants, or for economic justice generally. Usually these Catholics also feel the political and intellectual need to define themselves, and perforce place themselves on the Left. Now, in some cases these Catholics really are left-Lockeans, but in other cases they are genuine Catholics who take up leftist causes simply because many of these causes are good. Most of us when placed in a milieu will identify with it and accept it. Thus Catholics who are concerned more with issues our society deems left will usually come to support the entire left program; similarly for those Catholics who are more concerned with issues our society puts on the Right. We Catholics, then, are made to serve others' agendas and to subordinate a complete vision of Catholic political topics to a

set of priorities that is not of our making and is even based on unreality.

We must discover that real Catholic politics are outside the Lockean spectrum, and we must learn to see ourselves as neither right-nor left-Lockeans, but as Catholics, who ought to differ from one another only within the clear bounds of permissible Catholic teaching. When once we begin correctly to see ourselves for what we are, it will become harder for various self-interested parties to co-opt us for their own purposes as simply adjuncts of the Right or Left. There are enough Catholics in the U.S. and the world that if we were educated to understand what we are and what we stand for, then political commentators, not to speak of practicing politicians, would have to accommodate themselves to us, and at the same time to the real nature of things, as they realize that not everyone exists and thinks within a Lockean framework. ■

VITAL WORKS RECONSIDERED, #13

Jean Bethke Elshtain

The Incarnational Mind vs. the Captive Mind

The Captive Mind.

By Czeslaw Milosz.

A faculty reading group of which I was a part last year was dedicated to exploring the politics and literature of the new central/eastern Europe. We decided to go back to Czeslaw Milosz's classic, *The Captive Mind*. It was derided when it appeared (the early 1950s) by those

still enamored with the world-historical project of Marxism. It also got located and even ground into pieces as but one of many polemical entries in Cold War argumentation. (Curiously, Milosz was informed by a member of his tenure review committee at Berkeley that he received tenure *in spite of*, not because of, the book. Oh, how hard it can be for liberals to be liberal!) The book deserved and, over time, has been dealt a somewhat better hand from the always fickle gods and goddesses who anoint or anathematize literary works, often for extra-literary reasons.

Hoping to come up with a fresh "take" on Milosz, I volunteered to lead the discussion on *The Captive Mind* and then found myself struggling to evade the sin of lifeless ratiocination, to forestall stealing abstractions from a text as stubbornly *incarnational* as Milosz's in framing my own comments on this enormously subtle

Jean Bethke Elshtain is Centennial Professor of Political Science and Professor of Philosophy at Vanderbilt University, as well as the mother of four children. A Contributing Editor of the NOR, she is the author of, most recently, *Women and War and Power Trips and Other Journeys*.