IN/TOLERANCE ---------- ELLIOTT #2074

In #2074.3 I promised this one. That section dealt with the tendency to intemperance in disagreements on hot public issues (not to mention hot private issues)--the specific reference being to capital punishment and "S.Africa," ie, apartheid. When one feels outrage, one has the responsibility (1) to step it up or down, cool it or heat it up, (2) to use one's inner cursor to retrieve and interrelate the words most appropriate (a) to one's feelings and (b) to the situation, (3) to decide whether to express the outrage, and if so (a) how, (b) to whom, (c) when, and (d) where. But such a mature, all-personal-powers-in-action process seldom occurs; most humans, when outraged, either bottle it all up (and pay a high price later) or blurt it all out mindlessly and selfrighteously. Lately, on most public issues, I've observed more blurting than bottling--ie, more of the aggressive than the passive form of immature response to strong negative emotion....This thinksheet ponders our human need to be tolerant and intolerant and the perplexity we all face as to when to be which as to what. And it pleads for generosity thereabout, in the interest of nurturing unity within the community of in/tolerant differences--in family, church, school, and government local and larger.

1. Family counselors agree that outrages unfaced together predict relationships falling apart. How true also of the less intimate, wider human individual-and-collective relationships! But it's tough, so conflict-managers make a good living.

2. "The bland leading the blind," and vice versa, describes the zombie condition of many minisocieties, esp. voluntary associations, esp. (I'm sad to say) religious congregations (churches, synagogues, mosques, et al). Pleasantness is the central virtue, "anything controversial" is the central tabu, strong feelings on anything are outré, and there's never any place for intolerance on anything except against intolerance itself. The mental state of such communities is like that of Orwell's "1984," with only Big Brother missing (and unneeded, as the negative social sanctions operate to maintain the zombiedom). Such a society is masturbatory, useless for impregnating the wider world with anything human. "A light to the nations"? Forget it; the light is under a bushel.

3. The introverted community described in sec.2 demands leaders who reinforce its zombiedom, make it feel good about itself. No theological seminary prepares clergy for this style of "ministry," but almost all teach some skills for both living with and outwitting this subversion of humanity and community.

4. As I was writing this today (16July86), a father phoned and expressed his worry that his teen daughter was so tolerant of her best girlfriend's decision to become a live-in (older argot, "shack up"). The father is a sophisticated New Yorker with a modern moral sense, not "judgmental" ---but with a moral sense and therefore antipermissivistic. He did not know how best to continue the conversation, which accordingly stopped. How did we get where we are, and might knowing that help us get to some place better for humanity? I'll take this up after presenting a grid transcending the simplistic moralizing of in/tolerance:

	TOLERANCE	INTOLERANCE
OUR	A	B
OTHERS'	C	D

AC & BD are the moralistic positions. The AC style is "To know all is to forgive all": the BD style is "If it's pleasurable it's evil." (The quotes are only suggestive, not doctrinal statements!) It gets complicated when you consider in/tolerance not as virtue/vice styles but as morally neutral (ie, neither is in itself either good or bad, right or wrong); other considerations must enter in as you seek to discern, in each case, what is moral (dynamic: the moralistic is static).

OVER

Of course nobody is pure AC or BD; some are unremarkable, tilting neither AC nor BD enough to speak of a tolerant or intolerant style, respectively. Nature, nurture, and the situation or issue all play roles in how we are (the upper register of the grid) and in how we see others (the lower register of the grid). In Jungian characterology: if you're "P" (perceiving more than judging), you'll be tempted to find more virtue in the left column; and if you're "J" (more judging than perceiving), you'll be temapted to find more virtue in the right column. Intragroup sanctions pressure members to conform to the in/tolerance constellation (ie, the pattern of tolerance/intolerance) that is one dimension of the group's identity. Deviance from this constellation of loves/hates, satisfactions/outrages, tolerances/intolerances is frowned on--the deeper the values-&-feelings investment of the group, the deeper the frown. If the nonconformity to the constellation is extensive enough for the member to be viewed as "no longer of our spirit" (say, a KKK member whose doubts about racism are sucking energy out of his belief in white supremacy), some sort of severance--withdrawal, shunning, ostracism--is almost certain to occur; and the fear of being disfellowshiped is powerful enough to keep most members "in line" and giving evidence thereof in the form of symbolic genuflexions to the constellation. The group views the conformist's behavior as "constructive," and the deviant's "critical consciousness" as disruptive or even destructive. ...The "our" in the grid's upper register thus can mean singular ("my") as intragroup or plural as intergroup.

5. Uncritical, mindless acceptance of one's group's constellation assures intolerance toward the group's deviants and toward other groups at the points where the other groups' constellations differ from that of one's own group. That's a definition of prejudice. Unexamined pet theorems, paradigms, and provincial interests blind AB from seeing CD; discernment is doubly impossible, impeded intellectually by the absence of the will to self-and-group examination and spiritually by the moral self-and-group righteous arrogance against the deviant and the alien. (I hear nothing from either Botha or Tutu transcending this mindset, eg. And here and there I notice broadminded who are narrowspirited, and vice versa.)

6. In prayer, Bible study, the communion of saints, witnessing in the world with all our powers, we hear from time to time God's call to move from A to B (as Nancy Reagan has become increasingly intolerant of drugs, eg) or from B to A (as, eg, EurAmerica in the past 3 cs. has moved into religious tolerance). Truth as we perceive it sometimes asks that we be intolerant, but never to violate love: love sometimes asks us to be tolerant, but never to sell our souls to sentimentality and dishonor in violation of truth as we perceive it.

7. In/tolerance is not only a split but also a continuum, each both the unused potential of the other and the other's opposable thumb. Freedom exists not in either but rather in the action-options that open to consciousness when in/tolerance are seen as polar in (Jas. Gustafson) "the process of moral discernment" with the intent of action.

8. Antipuritanism from the "George" women Eliot & Sand, successors of Hester Prynne and predecessors of Lady Chatterley and "the sexual revolution," elevates relaxed, laid-back, permissive tolerance and denigrates puritanical, uptight, judgmental, selfrighteous intolerance. The adjectives are more emotive than referential. The USA had good feelings (vibes) about NASA, too good, so we got "Challenger"; same for the USSR & "Chernobyl." When the public mood is positive, upbeat, the prophet (ie, critic) is unheard or, worse, heard and punished.