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ISTPHOBIA*: THE FEAR OF BEING CALLED AN -IST

* If you prefer, "istophobia."

Since I've heard of no recommended treatment for this disease, I just may put my mind to it. But diagnostic before indication: this Thinksheet looks at the dominant symptom, which is the **tendency** of normally courageous individuals **to cringe**--in person & in print--from fear that expressing certain opinions will result in their being called some sort of -ist, the cringing intense enough to throttle the expression. I have seen grown men & women observe silence in the presence of expressed errant nonsense & even prejudice, rather than risk ostracism or even slight disfavor by providing countering facts or a countering point of view. Result, an evil & a deprivation. The **evil:** The repression is an instance of the wisesaying that evil flouishes when "good men" fail to speak out against it. The **deprivation:** Those speaking/writing error & illusion are deprived of the confrontation necessary to render correction possible....The results of this timidity, rationalized patronizingly as kindness, are uniformly dismal....If Eric Berne had lived long enough, he'd have included istophobia in GAMES PEOPLE PLAY, his wonderful, playful work on sociotherapy.

1. It takes one to know one. Jesus & Paul were hard on the Pharisees because they were Pharisees: I'm hard on liberals because (yes, George Bush!) I am one....We liberals ironically elevate **the individual** as the bottom line of freedom/oppression, yet--against the conservatives--preach that the individual is too weak without multilayered government support. Again, we weaken our exaltation of the individual, when it comes to blame, in blaming **society** more than the individual. And yet again, we incline to bite the hand that feeds our individual: our libertarianism (eg, the ACLU) vigorously attacks society whenever an individual's "rights" are seen to be at stake. A confused picture, indeed; or at least complicated enough to yield conflicting clarities and consequently (1) endless debates &, usually, (2) political impotence (becoming easy targets of both the political left & the political right)....Mike Dukakis just isn't up to working his way through this thicket.

2. **Anticategoricalism** is an indicator of the presence of istphobia. The (self-)victim lives & lines out anticategoricalistic slogans, such as "People are persons, not categories," & "The individual transcends all categories." This philosophy can have oppressive, as well as liberative, effects on individuals; and projected to the social dimension, as a politics, can be disastrous, **anarchy** being its radical-egalitarian logic ("equality as primordial condition of liberty," as Michael Bakunin [d.1876] put it, with 46 other anarchists on trial in 1870; the quotation continues with what is, to my knowledge, the first appearance of this noble, utopian yet logical, sentiment: "From each according to his faculties, to each according to his needs.").

3. The Biblical doctrine of **creation** is a resource for understanding the bipolarity of humanity: God made/makes individuals & communities (families, races, tribes, nations), the person-in-community. Beneath that polarity is the sexual: God made us male & female. And beneath that polity lies the genetic-chromosomal pool out of which spin wildly different human "types, personalities," making for social polarities, "vocations," & (not only in Hinduism!) classes. The God who is "not the author of confusion" (1Cor. 14^{33}), in making things interesting, has made **order** tough for us to achieve and maintain against everthreatening multifaceted **chaos**. The resulting political polarization appears when the question is asked: Which is more risky, the threat to freedom in avoiding chaos (as **liberalism** teaches) or the threat to order in avoiding social overcontrol (as **socialism** teaches--eg, in the deterioration of Hegel's "philosophy" into Marx's "ideology").

4. The USA is foundationally liberal, the definition of "the individual" (ie, the human with "unalienable rights") having been extended as we've moved along. Our other & parallel development is that, without weakening **negative** liberty (freedom FROM), we've been increasing **positive** liberty (freedom FOR) by enlarging the concept of

over

"rights"--which has opened to us, increasingly, both the virtues and the dangers of socialism--the experience the USSR & the PRChina are now having via-a-vis negative rights)....Capitalism is masculine, socialism is feminine; they come together (the systems are now melding) and have a baby. What shall we call the baby? Look for new words in the next few years. **"Demarchy"** (Greek, δέμος+ἀρχή , "people"+"rule") is the baby's name if Jn. Burnheim's suggestion sticks -- in his IS DEMOCRACY POSSIBLE? THE ALTERNATIVE TO ELECTORAL POLITICS (U. of Cal./85; paper/89). "Democracy" has failed: candidates can't discuss the real issues because "the people" won't stand for it, nor will the people stand for the candidates' avoiding discussing the real issues. "The people" want government off their backs and doing for them eveything they want government to do for them. "The people" want both freedom, which leads to increasing inequality and rich/poor gap, and at the same time fairness, which requires restrictions on freedom (called, in this context, "greed"). "Democracy" is as soiled a word as is "socialism." Back to the drawing boards with both; and let's get a fresh start with "demarchy." (The exposition is mine, but the insight is JB's.)

5. **Generalizations** are both dangerous and necessary, and it's not only foolish but also dangerous to deny their necessity. By "blood" I'm more German than anything else, and I generalize that it's dangerous to let Germans gang up: they tend to gang upon against other people(s). I never tire of the most dramatic incident, in my experience, stating this truth. When not long after WWII I asked Kurt Scharf, bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg (of both Germanies, and thus the highest German Protestant cleric) how many Germanies there should be, there being two at the time, without hestitation and with a smile, looking me in the eye, he said "Never less than three." In the USA you need not fear being looked down on as an ist (in this case, an antiteutonist) if you point out this German weakness. Not even if you have no German in your "blood." So also if you point out "Anglo" weaknesses; that won't result (except among some nativists) in your being called guilty of antiangloism. But woe to you (at least in liberal circles) if you generalize about the weaknesses of blacks or hispanics (in which case you're a racist) or Jews (in which case you're antisemitic).

6. A kind of **social solipsism** obtains if group criticism is socially acceptable only when ingroup--in my case, when criticizing Germans, Scots, English, males, Protestants, the middle class. I refuse to observe this taboo; truth & societal health forbid it. And since my religion makes me a warrior for truth & societal health, my religion forbids my honoring this stricture. So I've often been called a racist, a sexist, a classist; in any group I am unsafe in both senses (the group is unsafe in my presence, & I am unsafe from what the un/spoken social sanctions can do to me). The very title of this Thinksheet would make conformists uneasy.

7. The Prayerbook's petition for "a right judgment in all things" includes our rightly judging both ends of the human polarity, both individuals and groups. Since we ate that apricot (Gn.3--no, not an apple), we've had the duties as well as the rights of ethical (right/wrong-decisional) living: we are not free to be (to use the ugly, since-the-1960s common, word) "nonjudgmental." Those of us who are a _ _ _ J need to look sharp lest we put too much time and energy into judging, as non-Js need to to see they put enough. (Reference: the 16 Jungian personality-types, as in "Introduction to Type," Isabel Briggs Myers: I am an ENFJ, extraverted-intuitive-feeling-judging type.)

8. Now I'll risk an application of this Thinksheet. I'll give you an undiscussable, even unthinkable, question behind a question. The question is, "Should South Africa have a black government?" Now the question behind that: **"Are blacks capable of democratic, republican, self-government?"** If our evidence weighs on the no side of the behind-question, the question gets an automatic no....The evidence against that black capability is overwhelming historically & in the present. The hungriest, poorest, and most repressive government in the West. hemisphere, Haiti, has had a black government since 1804; & Guyana, which was a prosperous British colony & then member of the British Commonwealth of Nations, has been a wretched mess since in 1966 it was taken over by a black government. So now, am I a racist for thinking a black government for South Africa is a dumb, dangerous idea?