

Of late, many have hastened to reassure me that God is not dangerous....so many as to arouse my suspicions as to the whys of their negation and to raise in me fresh reflections on the question, which is not a question for the Bible, which assumes that God is dangerous and would rather not be (ie, would rather the world were in shalom, and so there'd be no further function for the divine danger).

This Thinksheet's OCCASION, in the context of those reassurers referred to above, is the news reports last week (Aug/86) that some South American lake gods had gotten mad and killed 1,200 who'd been living in a particular lake basin, and--the second part of the reports--the survivors, believing "We must have been doing something wrong," were setting about to research out the wrong so as to explain the explosion, so to make sense of the tragedy so as to be able to get on with their lives, including their worship-placation of the lake gods. The third part of the reports: limnologists and other interested scientists were flying in to study (1) what gas(es) did the killing and (2) how the gas(es) were formed and (3) released and (4) spread and (5) how the gases killed and (6) how best the undead victims should be treated and (7) what might to done to anticipate such an explosion, there being many lakes in that geological region, and (8) whether people should be permitted to live within the perimeters of these lake basins. Like the natives, the scientists were concerned to explain the explosion: in what sense, if any, were the scientists trying, as were the natives, to make sense of the tragedy? The scientists were looking for a "natural" explanation with no moral content or cosmic context: the natives were looking for a "moral" explanation with no natural content or scientific context. God, the lake gods, were for the natives dangerous and for the scientists nonexistent (at least as scientists).

1. In the above news item, how do you feel about the natives and the scientists? If you find all the wisdom on the scientists' side, you are what used to be called a "modern man." Both premodern (a.k.a. prescientific) man and postmodern man have somewhat more than sympathy for the natives. Biblical man (ie, we Christians and Jews to the extent we are biblical), believing that God is dangerous (as well as "loving"), has a critical consciousness that includes as a criterion the possibility, in each untoward circumstance--occasion--event, that God, the dangerous God, the dangerousness in God, is the effective cause. The biblical leaders (patriarchs, prophets, Jesus, apostles) believe the outbreaks of the dangerous God are predictable, their causes explainable on the basis of human im/moral response to God's teachings and guidance--a predictability intellectually parallel with the scientists: life's moral consistency in the former case, the world's physical consistency in the latter case. Try Zephaniah 3: "Jerusalem is doomed" for its evil even though "the LORD is still in the city, doing what is right and never what is wrong"; but after the destruction of the city and the nations, Jerusalem (and Israel-Judah) "will never again rebel," you will be "a humble and lowly people, who will come to me for help." You "will do no wrong to anyone"; you "will be prosperous and secure, afraid of no one." Zeph. concludes with a song of joy: "Sing and shout for joy, people of Israel!....The LORD has stopped your punishment....there is no reason now to be afraid....The LORD will take delight in you, and in his love he will give you new life....The LORD says, I have ended the threat of doom....I will punish your oppressors....and bring the exiles home." But the returned exiles, instead of coming to God for help by restoring the Temple, help themselves to fine houses, privatized shalom--so the dangerous God literally dries them up: drought (Haggai 1)....For these Prophets, God is the effective-efficient-final cause of "natural" and historical as well as personal woes, so God's displeasure-anger is first-level heuresis: I/we must have been doing something wrong. So too when "the wicked prosper": watch out, you doomed wicked (and, O righteous, watch for and observe the doom of the wicked). Nor, according to Late

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Judaism and Christianity, does this dangerous of God cease with our physical death: the universe is moral on both sides of the grave: hell/heaven both here and there. We are not only called to live morally (in the broad senses of piously & ethically) but, by God's double predictability (ie, both negative & positive reinforcements--fore as promises/threats, aft as rewards/punishments), encouraged-strengthened-helped so to live: the divine Parent, in our healthy world-home, lays down and enforces firm guidelines (Decalog, Double-Love Commandment, et al). This, in the history of Christian theology, is stated most shockingly (in the mode of Jesus!) as double predestination, rigid Calvinism's way of stating the absolute moral sovereignty of God (extended from Romans 9-11). Parallel with Protestant fundamentalism's shibboleth "Do you believe in the Virgin Birth?" might be here "Can you make any sense out of Double Predestination?" For one thing, it's a preNietzschean beyond-good-and-evil radical centering in God, whose nature-will defines good/evil; for another, it's a radical attack on fudgings of this theocentricity--such as the weaseling this Thinksheet is attacking, viz the notion that we can clean up, ethicize, improve, Christianize (!) the biblical God by eliding his (sic) dark side (!), so that he is no longer dangerous. We know what to do with domestic animals to make them undangerous: castration, defanging, declawing. And we know, taught as we are by Satan, how to make human beings undangerous: lobotomy, pacifying drugs, brainwashing, sleep deprivation, et al. Transcendentalized, these monstrous crimes are inflicted on God, who is thus....

2.depersonalized. The category of the personal cannot be reduced to the category of the mechanical. A computer is univocally "good" when it "works" for us, does what we want in single-direction predictability; but a spouse (in addition to being transmorally unpredictable, which God is not!) isn't always "good," doesn't always do what one wants, and is double-directionally predictably (cursing as well as blessing, to use the semitic nomenclature; threat as well as promise; punishment as well as reward). The major moral reason for marriage breakdown today is disappointment with one's spouse, who turned out to be--as God used to be!--dangerous, "for worse" and not only (as romantically anticipated) "for better." Efforts to depersonalize-domesticate a spouse are high comic material before & since Shakespeare--comic, however, only if the efforts are unsuccessful: if successful, we have a broken human being--as, when the parallel theological effort is successful, we have a broken, depersonalized, mechanical-good "God." Understandable that we're in a time of the trivial, of anticcommitment, in sex & spirituality.

3. Instant gratification conceals, privately and publicly, delayed disaster, and biblical Prophecy aims to reveal, de-veil (the etym. meaning of "re-veal"), this concealment. In Taoism as religious philosophy (as distinct from cult), this de-veiling is timeless; in Stoicism as both religion and philosophy, it's cyclical; in biblical religion, it's relational, a reality interpersonal between God and his (sic) people both collectively (as synagogue & church) and distributively (as worshippers). ("His": it's hopeless, this desire to convert the biblical god into an androgyn; esp. in Christianity, in which by incarnation God becomes a male rather than, eg in Unificationism, a human couple m/f. Still, I usu. avoid, in divine ref., "he" & "his.")

4. Since God is dangerous to resisters of reality/relationship, everybody --unless repentance/forgiveness intervenes--gets his-hers sooner or later, by instant-or-delayed disaster. That's biblical realism though it's unenlightened fundamentalism to religious liberals and primitive superstition to the secular-minded (aka. agnostics & atheists). Alternative paradigms are gaining some credence in the West from the East: karma-reincarnation from India, yin/yang cosmic homeostasis from China.