

ANYBODY'S IDEA OF **JUSTICE** IS FUTURIC BECAUSE
 THE PRESENT IS THE LENS THROUGH WHICH
 THE PAST IS VIEWED FROM THE FUTURE

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It's 60 years since I began experimenting with optics, so it surprises me that till today I'd never thought up the analogy in this Thinksheet's title, though I've used the idea for a very long time. Eschatology is "where it's at," the usual "colgn" from which we "vantage." Malcolm Forbes, now two-days-dead, was the happy capitalist because he was forever dreaming up how next to have fun: today's fun was yesterday's dream & tomorrow's promise: "You have to have a sense of being turned on by making something go well." And a "girl" he sometimes escorted just for friendship & show, Liz Taylor, puts it neatly: "When people say she's got everything, I've only one answer: I haven't had tomorrow." And Jesus lived from the fullcome Kingdom of God to the partcome here-&-now Kingdom of God--so he could have said "I haven't had tomorrow yet, but I will" & "I have tomorrow today."....As I write, a glorious display of Inferno lilies greets anyone entering our home through the greenhouse. I see them now in full bloom: I foresaw them five months ago when I turned up the tiny bulbs while spading garden. As I was about to throw them in the compost, I "saw" (foresaw) them in full bloom in the greenhouse; so I potted them, left them out to freeze solid, then brought them in & watered them, believing them too small to bloom their first year. Surprise! Joy! The simple mystic satisfaction of shared pride ("I planted...God gave the increase" [ICor.3:6f])....In science, it's called the nonobjectivity hypothesis: the observer's intentionality in the observation influences, makes impure (or polluted!), the observation. The principle applies across the whole range of attention (dramatically visible in the psychopatholgy of perception). And it should make us freer when we read history, the present, others, ourselves (including our strengths/weaknesses, fears/hopes, loves/hates)...Now for some implicates of the principle vis-a-vis this Thinksheet's title:

1. The **past** cannot be viewed objectively, disinterestedly. Not even ancient government records (eg, statistical accounts in kings' annals, & transcriptions of Roman court proceedings). The interpreter of any historical material, secular or sacred, should exercise critical consciousness (latterly called "the hermeneutics of suspicion"): "What is this historian up to, & why?" It's easy to manage when reading Pastor Weems' LIFE OF WASHINGTON. Harder when reading the historical material in Scripture. Hardest still when reading one's own familial-tribal-ethnic-racial-national history. Hardest when reading-telling-writing one's own individual-personal story. In this series, it gets more difficult at each step because the distortive pressures (closeness, emotion) increase.

2. A **human being** is so complex no biographer can (1) put everything in or, in the case of what's selected for inclusion, (2) order the material according to import ("importance" being a value concept relative to the biographer's particular point of view, as much as colors on an artist's palette). With autobiography, these difficulties are the greater. When you tell your story, give your testimony, bear your witness, what do you put of first importance & so on down the receding line? Is your life a success or a failure? Your choice: any life can honestly be written as either, depending on the writer's angle (of vision & intention).

3. What is true of an individual is even more true of a **group** & the interactions of groups (ie, historical situations). At different times & under different lights the same narrator may "tell" an historical situation so differently that the hearer can know the same situation's being described only by the bare-bones continuity (time, place, some persons, some events; each telling is its own unique P-TIE-P [persons-time-ideas-events-places]).

How many ways can the stories of WWII & of the Cold War be honestly & plausibly told? How one tells these stories reveals (1) one's philosophy of history, (2) one's intellectual community (whether or not one's support community), (3) one's proximate hopes for the world, & (4) one's ultimate hope for the world & thus one's theology. If I were to hear you tell these two stories, I could learn something of all four of these aspects of your inner life & might make some good guesses as to your ecosocial & political commitments & activities. I'd be less confident of identifying your religious association, for that is often determined by nonphilosophical & nonpolitical factors such as personal religious experience, family, & the aggressive evangelism & recruitment activities of churches.

Well, how am I now telling these two stories (& in case you're that interested, what does this storytelling reveal about me)? For me, the truth that **justice is futuric** is critical. I've just returned from a silent Ash Wednesday eucharist in our church. Among the readings we were handed at the door was one of Cheryl Meyer that ended thus: "I look for reasons / I look for causes / I want logic / In an

illogical situation....// But sometimes things just happen. / It's wrong. / It's unfair. / I don't like it. / It hurts. / It causes pain. / Still a tragedy happens / and slowly, oh, so slowly, / I live with reality." Time for me to reread Unamuno: my sense of the intertwine of tragedy & faith is deepening (or why Ash Wednesday? Lent? the Crucifixion?). I am to "do justice" (yes, Mic.6:8), but this includes doing justice to limits as well as to powers, justice to my experience as illumined from many dimensions & directions (parents, siblings, churchfolk, teachers, Scripture, traditions, prayer, reflection, friends, opponents, successes, failures), justice to the good earth now threatened by the humanity bomb (by the end of this decade, 1 billion more mouths--more than the present population of China!--& religion the greatest impediment to control)...The account I give of things-events-people reveals, too, my conviction that God rules from above & **words** rule below, in history. Words, believed words, are fire on the earth. The words of Marx were a world fire now dying for want of fuel, viz humane achievements, without which no words can remain even plausible (so socialist Mandela can be let out of prison; & anticommunism is no longer a necessary element in U.S. foreign policy). Words gain their power from their story context (of which I was keenly aware as this morning I told the Christian Story to a nonChristian). In a flat, flaccid, scientistic world, we need (says Marianne Moore) to "reinstate enchantment....// You're not free / until you've been made captive by supreme belief" [in her "Spenser's Ireland"]. Nationalism is a backfire against ideology, so it's widely now the fire-in-the-bones replacement for dying Marxist-Leninist regimes (& for 40 years it's been the chief U.S. foreign policy weapon against Marxism-Leninism: if we couldn't have democracy, we'd settle for thugocracy as a barrier against communism, which is more dangerous because it believes in words, whereas thugs only believe in themselves & soon pass from the scene)....So I sketch my versions of the two stories:

WWII was the outbreaking of German & Japanese expansionism, both of them nationalistic & thugocratic but ideological (words-believing) only within nationalism. I didn't get too worked up about it, for I thought that the essential tribalism of our two enemies condemned them to wither in their transnational extensions. (As for fascism, it was not a true transnational ideology but only a fragile economic tool in the hands of Mussolini, Hitler, & Franco.)...What about **the Cold War**?

Well, I took Marxist-Leninist expansionism more seriously: it was word-believing, ideological, transnational (all, like Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, all of which it rightly viewed as rivals, enemies). I opposed anticommunist witchhunting here at home (& even used communist \$ against it), but generally supported efforts to stamp out communist fires abroad* (even though, oops, that's how we got Khomeini & Pinochet--you can't win 'em all). The Sandinista constitution is Marxist, captive to the communist myth of inevitability (cleverly called by Geo.Will "the leftward ratchet of history"), so--fearing words, as I do--I favored economic sanctions, the Contras, & \$3 million to help Ms. Chamorro oust Mr. Ortega.** And Bush should bargain hard with Gorby to persuade the Soviets to withdraw all support for Castro.

While we were ruining the feeble Soviet economy with the arms race & bleeding "the evil empire" by various sorts of attacks on its fingers & toes, the Japanese & West Germans were building their eco-empires, destroying our eco-imperial hegemony. But that rough replica of the Statue of Liberty in Tiananmen Sq., that's an American expansionism of words ("liberty," "freedom," "democracy") only tyrants need fear. But we Christian Americans deny ultimacy even to those words, giving first rank to the words central to our faith, words of ultimate axioms: the former are only of proximate or middle axioms (which strategies & tactics aim at), & are never to be identified with the will of God....so....

4. **Christian leaders** should never become overinvested in particular political outcomes--not even "democracy." And should be wary of slogans--"justice," "peace," "the market economy," "equality." History, reading the great historians, should teach us skepticism, knowing that coherence, "meaning," requires two narrowings, viz to a point of view & to the data-selectivity thereof; & agnosticism as to prediction: eg, were the West's pressures necessary to the collapse of "the evil empire"? I think so. I can't know. Nobody can know. By revelation we do know what we should pray for & live toward & see both present & past from: "the Kingdom of God."

*EXCEPTION: I was for Ho Chi Minh as a (communist) southern plug against Chinese expansionism.

**Ortega, with Castro one of the two Western Hemisphere military metastasizers of the Marxist-Leninist cancer.