

WITH A LIBERAL WOOF

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636

Phone 508.775.8008

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A conversation in which the **liberal**, whose sun is declining in the West & rising in the East (the sinic & communist Easts), takes the initiative, respondent #1 being the **traditional(ist)**, respondent #2 being the **weaver**, who is usually content with what's implicit in the conversation, so says little

Inasmuch as many are undertaking to (re)define liberalism, it seems good to me to set up within myself, & share with you, a pertinent conversation whose participants are designated only by the three typefaces (above). The §§ are, in order of importance, what currently I see as components of liberalism.

1. LEISURE

Like Socrates, I have, beyond what's necessary for the exigencies of my existence, some disposable hours & expendable dollars: I'm "free" (Latin "liber," thus "liber-al") from the totally consuming toil of most of humankind in history & even today, & from reluctant leisure without dollars (a debilitating aspect of the condition of "the poor"). I have the leisure-luxury to think-speak-act on my own, society exacting various costs (not excessive in our "liberal" culture) for this behavior. *Beware! Remember what I did to Socrates for modeling idleness & unharnessed thinking for Athens' youth. His investments portfolio supported him but could not save him. Youth rots without work, society rots without creative-courageous thinkers.*

2. LITERACY

Before reading, there were prophets, inspired-intuitive & therefore independent-individual. But reading, a linguistic relationship requiring the personal presence of only one human being, makes every reader a sort of prophet. Reading prophesizes the public & relativizes tradition & institutions. *Relativizes? Destroys! A "reading public" is ungovernable.* But an illiterate public is at the mercy of readers--a situation being reversed: readers are more & more at the mercy of nonreading tele-viewers, who are at the mercy of the image industry (on which see Bill Moyers' autumn/89 "Imaging America" series, laying out how the commercial manipulation of images targets primal-gut feelings & discourages thought--is, thus, antiliberal). It's not good news for humanity that the need to read has radically declined; for it's becoming harder to manage one's own life against the image-oppressive society, & reading is a primary self-management tool, more time-independent than are the electronic media & film. *Reading is silent hearing: hearing is primary & communal. Readers are once removed from "hearing the word of the Lord."* Wyclif's every-ploughboy-a-Bible-reader was not entirely a good idea. Besides, the church is necessary for Bible-interpreting, Bible-understanding. The church as individual commitment + communal experience combines speaking/listening & writing/reading. Real Bible-study under church auspices teaches, along with hermeneutics, communication skills (including the trivium: language [grammar], thinking [logic], persuading [rhetoric]).

3. CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Reasoning ability, both analytic & synthetic, "liber-ates" this liber-al from unwitting & intentional entrapments in errors reason can spot, illusions logic can expose, ideologies that hermeneutics can prove unable to stand the tests of reality. *Careful! Do I catch a note of overconfidence in reason, of oldfashioned rationalism? What of intuition, which that great logician Wm. James held to be superior to reason? And what of faith--& hope, & love? And what of beliefs, those fabrics woven of faith & reason? We need critical consciousness to test our convictions, sorting out opinions & prejudices; but does not what's tested have a higher status than the testing?*

4. TOLERANCE

In contrast to the traditionalist's rigidity & neophobia (fear of the new & of change), I am tolerant of differences (pluralism) & of change (change is my tradition!). *When in doubt between old & new, I go for the old: it's time-tested & more apt to be true. And I observe that much of what passes for tolerance is mere convictionlessness.*

4. INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY

I believe in my, & your, rights to liberty & property. *How about your responsibilities & accountability? Heteronomy & theonomy? Community, religious & political?*