

PEANUTS®

by Charles Schulz

As always and everywhere, here Lucy has a problem. Besides having an authoritarian personality, she's as solitarily into her ego as an oyster and "normally" crabby because she just can't interest the universe in orbiting around her. In fact (as you can see here), the universe won't even get out of her way (=passive resistance) and sometimes responds impedingly (=active resistance). It's so hard to be God when you're not, & your reward (ie, punishment) for trying is that you wind up not being just short of God, or a little lower than the angels, but nobody at all--and not even there (Ger. "Dasein," in concrete-historical existence).

Lucy is Every person ludicrously enlarged and, paradoxically, consequently somebody who is there for us as a convex mirror of ourselves. In his PUSH days, Jesse Jackson encouraged black chn. to say "I am SOMEBODY!"--then decided he could do more good by going off & becoming somebody himself (and may have made the right decision). Your hunger to be both there and somebody is forever running up against the same hunger in me, and vice versa. There's nothing for it but either to fight it out (inevitably, lose-lose) or figure out how to be there for each other. And when we are there for each other, the problem of being somebody is well on the way of being solved.

What this thinksheet is doing is so obvious to anybody over age 20 that you can easily do it yourself...so I'll just throw a few comments all over the ballpark.

1. Let deontology precede psychopathology: humans have, as humans, the need to be noticed by other humans (as present, "there") as somebody of some "significance" (ie, social-contributive meaning). Existential anxiety is the tumorous form of this needing vis-a-vis humanity: one is desperate for recognition, on illusional fear that else one will cease to exist--and, vis-a-vis divinity, when God is



© 1986 United Feature Syndicate, Inc.

not there for one and is nobody, existential anxiety is cosmic and one's life is meaningless to oneself (so Frankl's logotherapy).

2. Boris Pasternak, esp. as his last letters reveal, was centrally concerned with the power and responsibility of the artist (author, musician, coreographer, or worker in any of the plastic arts, as well as the speaker, including the preacher and counselor) to provide some relief, for themselves and the rest of humanity, from the burdens of time, history, and the existential (time-bound) self. Think through his best-known work, DR. ZHIVAGO, and you'll see this truth in how he handles loving-suffering-despairing-hoping human beings in a historical context approaching maximum inimicability for human life. Somebodies somewhere become nobodies anywhere till somewhere they find one another and there become somebodies to each other. (Margaret Mitchell,  $\frac{1}{2}$  c. ago today (30June86), published her similar but shallower and schmaltzier GONE WITH THE WIND.) Just take the protagonist, DR. Z., as a study in what this thinksheet's title calls "grief/relief," our ambivalent feelings about being, throughout life's course, both noplaces/somewhere and nobody/somebody.

3. Both the driven (high-achieving) and withdrawn (low-achieving) person fights the feeling of "I've never been anywhere and I've never been anybody." The difference is that the former has more to fight with, a difference that shrivels in the presence of God or just self-reflection (with/out the aid of an enabler). But Scarlett O'Hara is not self-reflective and certainly does not stand in the presence of God, so at the end of GONE she's left alone with her desperate illusion of self-divinity. Reminds me of a recent survey of college kids in our Midwest: 95% want to be promiscuous and marry virgins. (Is Dr. Z. as typically Russian as Scarlett O. is American?)

4. The current Gospel of Self-Esteem, latterday child of the Gospel of Positive Thinking, is a self-fulfilling prophecy in a can-do culture in which only the producer-achiever is anybody and failures are nowhere. It fails the test of being a biblical person but passes the pragmatic test of helping folks make it in late-20th-c. USA. Biblically, self-esteem is derivative from God-esteem: when God is my God, I know where I am (in God's world), I am somewhere (where God wants me here-and-now to love and serve), and I am somebody (a creature-child-servant of God, follower of Jesus in church and world). Yes, the Gospel of Self-Esteem uses all the OK biblical words; but the glory has fallen from God to me, and with it has come the burden of being somebody-in-myself and somewhere-for-myself. Existential anxiety dressed in a religious robe. I'm not contradicted here by that gospel's naive faith in tithing: grace is God's gift, magic is human manipulation--and the glass cathedral preaches the latter, using the words of the former.

5. When we seek to discover and do God's will, we discover simultaneously that we're somebody-somewhere. And there's no age-limit. Retirees, whom I'm now more knowing about that I'd ever been before, deal daily with their griefs/reliefs over where and who they were before retirement. Adolescents, the same for their exit from childhood. Middleagers, the same for the increasingly frequent transitions (job, spouse, residence) in this life-passage. The human condition, folks. And spiritual direction can increase, throughout one's living of life, glory for God and good, peace, joy for the soul, society, and the earth.

6. Thanks to God's gift of imagination, at any moment we can make inner correction for thinking either too highly or too lowly of ourselves. We can anticipate divine deliverance from the burdens of too much or too little social attention. We can dream and decide to act toward a more rewarding (for ourselves and others) self-involvement in church & world.