

Consciousness, "PERSON," GOD

SCOPE: This Thinksheet looks at the mental idea-mix of consciousness/"person"/deity cultural-linguistically through the lenses of key words in the three Christian-theology-formative cultures--Hebraic/Hellenic-Hellenistic/Roman--with the hopeful intent of producing a template for examining the neo-Christianizing process--Christianity re-viewing its conceptions of consciousness/"person"/deity as it interacts with cultures new to it in place (geographical expansion) & time (emergent cultures [major cultural changes] in each place). A huge undertaking! On one sheet (a two-page Thinksheet) I can only make some notes toward this goal.

1 Consciousness is awareness-in-paradigm (every paradigm giving its denizens unconscious significance-signals, i.e. cues-clues as to what's un/important to pay attention to, i.e. to be aware of). The paradigms are, as social constructs, the invisible dwellings in each of which the denizens (dwellers) can live amicably because the architecture has anticipated all basic human needs & answers all basic human problems. When a paradigm collapses, the residents are at as great a loss & confusion as ants whose hill has just been stepped on: keeping the paradigm in good repair & far from collapsing is the central goal of conservatism, which by attention to change-resistance keeps the society stable (&, when overdone, stagnant).

2 To the residents of any paradigm, preachers of transformation (a new paradigm) are seen as wreckers wielding the blue-prints for a new building on the same site (they preach to "stop conforming yourselves..." & "let God transform you..." [Ro.12.2]; give up your comfortable mental construct & "have this mind..." [Phil.2.5]). Even the neonate's consciousness is not a pure tabula rasa (blank slate). Nobody's unprejudiced, entirely open-minded, with consciousness unbent in any shape or direction.

3 Consciousness is both an evolutionary & an individual-developmental emergent. Both are patient of, explorable by, science. Unavailable to scientific methodology is the question whether the category "consciousness" is exhausted by manifestations available to observation + verifiable/falsifiable processes. We do know that the human eye can see only a tiny span within the electromagnetic spectrum: the human body has no organ for ascertaining whether what we call "consciousness" is or is not less than the ontological spectrum of consciousness. Religion says it's less & is known (by nonscientific ways of knowing) to be less. Biblical religion teaches that consciousness is prevenient (in the Creator) as well as emergent. In teaching only emergent consciousness, the public schools are innocently (ignorantly) atheist: that is why Pres.Bush wants "both" evolution & intelligent design taught. Problem: "Intelligent design" can't be submitted to the scientific method so can't be science; but religion insists that God can be read in nature (e.g., Ro.1.19-20--on which the Fathers leaned heavily [pp37-40, Gerald Bray, ANCIENT CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON SCRIPTURE: Romans--IVP/98]).

4 "Person" --the second of our three terms-for-exploration in this Thinksheet--is a transliteration from Latin "persona," literally a face or a mask (as does Greek "prosopon," from the same compound stem). Calvin's INSTITUTES 1.13.3-6 prefers "manifestations" when speaking of the Trinity's three "persons." And he strongly resists--as materialistic--the Latin "substantia" as translation for the Greek "hypo-stasis"--preferring "subsistence" as closer to the Greek "ousia" (being) in the key anti-Arian word "homoousios" (the Son is of the 'same-being' or 'same-essence' as the Father). While the Bible presents Father/Son/Spirit as having three consciousnesses as well as one "name" (Mt.28.19), the trinitarian controversies were concerned with ontological rather than psychological issues. In the West today, "person" signals individual-independent consciousness, so it's not the best (& is a somewhat misleading word) for the three manifestations/subsistences/essences constitutive of the Trinity. But our idea of "person" roots in Augustine's emergent self-consciousness as detailed in his CONFESSIONS--Augustine, a father of trinitarian doctrine.

But let's look at the Hebrew, something the trinitarian-doctrine fathers did not do. Here, I'm answering the question "How do Israelis today say 'person'?" (There's only slight difference, on this, from ancient Hebrew.) They say "ben adam"

son of man [as in the close of Ps.84, "Blessed is the man"--rightly degendered as the plurals "those"--TEV, NLT---& "they"--REB--& singulars "the one"--R.K. Harrison, ESV--& "everyone"--CEV--those being the only instances in the whole history of the English Bible--some recent failures to degender: JB, TANAKH, & JB have "the man"; NAB has "the men"; NJB has "he"); or (masc.) "enosh"; or (masc.) "guph" (not in biblical Heb., which has only the fem. "gupha" [corpse!]; person as "body," but also means "substance, material, essence"). The **consistent masculinity** corresponds to the Eng. generic "he" as "he or she" horizontally (for humans) but not vertically (the God-references being consistently masc.). (An oddity: in Hebrew, he is "who" & she is "he"!) Finally, (masc.) "enoshim" (men, people) functions as the plural both of "enosh" & of "ish" (man, male; husband; anyone, any-body).

Now let's look at the Greek for "person." Two contrasts with the Hebrew: (1) The Greek terms are masc./fem./neut., not (as Heb.) only masculine; (2) The Greek is more visual, "persons" as seen. A person is a head ("kephale"), as in counting heads; a hand ("cheir"), as in the number of hands needed for a particular task; a body ("demas") among bodies, as in dem-o-cracy; a body ("soma") in itself, as in body-&-soul. (Phi.2.7 says Jesus took the form ["morphe"] of a servant; but independently the word never means "person.") (A male person opp. to a female person or a deity is "aner"; a human being opp. to a beast is "anthropos," which is usu. masc. &, when fem., sometimes contemptuous.) "Person" differs from "self": "psyche" (a life, living being [Gn.1.24 LXX]; a spirit/ghost/soul; an emotional or intellectual or moral self) is not a person.

Nor is a "hypostasis" a person even though the plural is usu. trd. "persons" (of the Trinity)! Here's its semantic range: (1) a supporting act or a settled thing (e.g., sediment); (2) a foundation or substructure; (3) a substance (so, substantial nature, actual existence, reality [e.g., as it appears in a mirror], real nature, essence [e.g., Heb.1.3]); (4) the full development of an idea; (5) wealth, substance, property. Biblically, Father/Son/Spirit are all masc.-personal, the Son on earth having been a male-embodied "person" in the usu. sense of the word, viz. a male-or-female-embodied conscious individual identity-self. Theologically, the Trinity's "persons" are the biblical realities viewed as ungendered-unembodied consciousnesses.

Now let's look at the Latin for "person." A human being (homo), a head (caput), a body (corpus & forma). Odd: Lat. "persona" is not a person but a mask or other representation of a person!

ANALOGY: The person (human & divine) in Hebrew is full-color; in Greek, full black-&-white drawing; in Latin, a stick figure.

5 **CONCLUSION:** Hebrew, religious; Greek, philosophical; Latin, pragmatic. The Bible's language for God is full-color Hebraic masculine-personal, & (politically motivated) reductions in its masculinity fade the color, weakening the personal dimension of deity & creating a new dialect in competition with classic Christian speech & writing.

6 "God" is this Thinksheet's title's third & last term in the idea-mix foundation-al to the Christian mind. Asked by Charlie Rose (9.28.05) "What for you is the most important unanswered question?", Richard Dawkins (Britain's most prominent atheist evolutionist) replied "How does subjective consciousness work?" That's the way a scientist put it: science investigates process. A methodological analogy: to some jungle carnivores, immobile prey does not exist: since God doesn't observably move, he doesn't exit in the minds of scientistists (who elevate science [a method of exploration toward commensurable knowledge] into scientism [a philosophy functioning also as a religion]). Buber's 1925 lectures said that without consciousness, reality would be It; with personal consciousness, the world is I-It; with interpersonal consciousness, the world (in the widest sense, viz. reality) is most fundamentally I-Thou (including prayer & small talk).

"God" is the apex of a triangle whose other angles (constitutive of the triangle) are the other two terms of this Thinksheet's title. Two-dimensional ("Flatland") thinkers, including scientistists, imagine that the triangle can collapse --"God" then blending into consciousness (as in Eastern a-dvaita [nonduality]) or into human personhood (as in Western individual/societal Prometheanism). Tragedy!