

"Over" signals excess. "Over the top" (in the sense of out-of-bounds). "Overpriced," "overdressed," an "overachiever," "over 12" (so must pay full price), "over budget," "over the [speed] limit," "over the line" (boundary violation), "over my head" (too difficult).

# The OVERBELIEVERS

An exploration of fanaticism  
as deleterious internal/external activity  
driven by excessive conviction

I never write a Thinksheet without learning something, & I wish I could say the same for your reading of them. From this one you can learn a word I found nowhere (in paper- or electronic-dictionaries) except in my head: **overbelieve**/r/s.

1 To check any thought that I may be a Stoic preacher of flat emotional affect (no highs/lows) for ataraxia (a calm, placid, untroubled inner life), or a Buddhist priest teaching satori (illumination after self-distancing from passions & suffering), I hasten to say that the biblical God models for us the full emotional range, including overflowing (excessive!) blessings when he's greatly pleased. An OT instance: "I will pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it" (Mal.3.10 NIV); a NT instance: "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap" (L.6.38 NIV; the vb. meaning lit. "over-out-pour" is itself excessive [pleonastic]; it's only here & in the Gk. of Joel 2.24: heralding the new age, the vats will "over-out-pour" grapejuice & oil). Joy! Compare, in Eng., "ebullient" (bubbling over); but contrast, in any language, the hostility-anger-rage of "boiling over."

The prodigal father (L.15) overflowed with forgiving love for his wayward son &, taking no thought for his own dignity, ran to the penitent profligate when the latter was as yet a long way off. Better to let love make a fool of you than to be a worse fool without it. Romantic fascination/addiction/obsession? "Head-over-heels in love." Creative passion or erotic mindlessness? By its fruit you will know it. And so with....

2 ....**fanaticism**: by its fruit you know it to be destructive-demonic, an enemy of beauty-truth-goodness-love-joy, & servant of a vain hope. A NYT bookreviewer says the authentic Am. Christmas is "overdoing it": fanatic materialism of possess & flesh. So much "super-fluous" ("over-flowing") trivia. NOTE on hyper/super: The same wd., pronounced "hhhh...." on the east side of the Adriatic (i.e., in Greek) & "ssss...." on the west side (i.e., in Latin). Latin being the West's basic language of culture, "super-" is more common than "hyper-," which (being the third floor of the West's languages in its relation to first-floor mother-tongues & second-floor Latin in its location) carries the rarer meanings. (Why bother with such linguistic technicalities? If you are the third party in the conversation & know the personal histories & predilections of the other two, you have a better base for understanding both them & yourself & for picking up the nuances of meaning in their speech. Open a Greek-Latin NT & read across the "valley" (geographically, the Adriatic) & you are experiencing the primary linguistic divide in Christianity: Greek Christianity (including Syrian & Slavic churches) & Latin Christianity (including Protestantism). Intellectually, spiritually, politically, the valley is bridgeable in the interest of truth, enrichment, love, & peace--&, in heart & mind, is daily bridged by those who read across the valley--reading that is the linguistic (& thus also the theological) bottomline of the (Christian) ecumenical movement. (So much confusion & conflict from language-ignorance, from the early Crusades [1095-, Latins slaughtering Greeks] to modern theology! So much overbelief, fanaticism!)

3 Fanatics turn up the heart on words, & they swell up: let's call this rhetorical inflation **overspeech**. An uninflated balloon is soft: "A soft answer turns away wrath" (Prov.15.1 NRSV); inflated, its harder (& more vulnerable!): "a hard word stirs up anger" (the distich's second line). Another image for overblown utterance: The very first expression I came upon on the left (Greek) side of my Greek-Latin NT this morning begins with "hyper-" and means "bombast that is an overburden of emptiness" (a humorous oxymoron; 2P.2.18). "Hot air" combines, in hotheads, head & (high-volume, high-pitch) windiness--"fighting words" (logomachies), mouth-wars leading (as now in the Holy Land) to technologically-enhanced muscle-wars.

4 ὑβρις *hubris* rides over people with disdain, contempt, insult, injury--from

feeling/conviction of "overness" (Lat., *super-bia*). \* 1Cor.18.1: Vaunted-flaunted special religious knowledge "puffs up" (8x Paul uses this word, whose phoneme is what you hear when somebody blows up a balloon--there's that windbag again!), but (now a dramatic metaphoric shift) love "builds up." The puffed up are swollen in their sense of self-importance, think (hyper-phron.) themselves superior, project (hyper-ephan.) themselves as superior. The deepest pain in the Palestinian soul vis-a-vis Zionists-Israeli is that the latter have arrogantly treated the former as inferiors, treatment that feeds fanaticism, which (as now in Jenin) Israel fans with further shameful-shaming treatment. Outside the Holy Land, Jews complain of being treated with contempt; inside, they treat Arabs with contempt, overbelieving in themselves, humiliating Muslim & Christian Israeli & nonIsraeli Arabs.

5 "Over" is spatial (Emerson's "oversoul," Nietzsche's "overman" [Übermensch]); but so is far, which as "too far" is "over the line" of the acceptable. "Sin," I sometimes say, "is anything extended *too far* in a straight line." Arguing may be OK, but physical blows carry the altercation *too far*. Spatial also is out, as in "outrage."

6 In Eden (Gn.3), Adam & Eve went to excess in enjoying the garden to the neglect of God. Because they had so much trouble practicing it, the ancient Greeks (esp. Epicurus) preached "the golden mean," moderation; & they had more than 100 terms (about two score of them beginning with "hyper-") describing violations thereof. Of these vices, perversions of virtues, hybris often headed the list; for as action it had no redeeming feature: it was, pure & simple, "evil for evil's sake" & for the pleasure or at least satisfaction of doing it. (The qt. is from p.98 of R.C.Trench's awesome masterpiece, SYNONYMS OF THE NT [London:1854,1906]. Comparing the three standouts among this class of vice-words, he says [99] they "occupy three different provinces of meaning" and "present to us an ascending scale of guilt:...the boastful in *words*, the proud and overbearing in *thoughts*, the insolent and injurious in *acts* [this last, *hybris*].)

Since 9/11 aimed only to terrify & destroy, it qualifies as full-force *hybris*. It was indeed the work of militant Islamist overbelievers, superreligious fanatics (though some analysts see them as making primarily a cultural rather than a religious statement; but for Islam, does that distinction have meaning?).

"God draws himself up in battle array against those who overesteem themselves" (my translation surfaces the metaphors of Jn.4.6; Prov.3.34; "scoffers"; 1P.5.5-9).

As hyped up illwill, *hybris* is (the Greeks said) an ass braying & prancing around from being overfed. It's pride let loose as murder, lust let loose as rape, insensitivity run riot as sadistic cruelty. It's power exercised against weakness for the sheer pleasure of exhibiting itself. And our advantages never cease tempting us to commit this sin against God with its crimes against humanity & the earth. The NT is word-rich in diagnostic resources for naming & nailing illegitimate pride, i.e. arrogance, haughtiness (Fr., "high," from which advantage the sinner "looks down" on others), outsized selfview (in some languages, "his mouth is too big for his body"). Reality being unkind to inflated self-images (self-overbelievers), rage breaks out (outrage) when deflation hits: call it the IDR syndrome. The rage begins with resentment & continues as inflexibility & (Taliban!) intolerance, then resolution to destroy all roadblock to one's goal of restoration of (excessive) self-dignity even, perhaps especially, in martyrdom (9/11).

7 "Evil prospers when goodness is silent." Risk-taking evil (9/11!) is rewarded, safe-playing goodness suffers: "not to decide is to decide." The underbelievers are the unwitting accomplices of the (overbelieving) fanatics. Hypo/sub: underbelievers have influence subordinate to that of overbelievers. Super/infer: underbelievers are, in social effects, inferior to overbelievers. A promotionally inert cohort resents promotionally aggressive cohorts. Aggressive witnesses in political power &/or cultural dominance press for laws against aggressive witness to other ways (presently, the major element in the persecution of Christians).

8 On the third try, Goldilocks came upon the porridge whose temperature was "just right." To trope the BCP (Book of Common Prayer), "Lord, give us a right judgment" in believing, that we neither over- nor under-believe.