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# THE VIEW FROM THE SHORE

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Not just my religion but also logic & the love of truth require me to look at things from others' **point of view** as well as my own. When the current USPO "Columbus' Arrival" stamp was issued, I was pleased with myself--with my updated raised consciousness--to note that the artist's point of view was, to use a PC neologism, eurocentric: we are looking at a half dozen naked savages. Of course, too, they are looking at us; but that is not the artist's, & our, point of view, which is from the sea. *WE* are discovering *THEM*. This Thinksheet concerns itself with the discoveries we make when we shift our P.O.V. I'm more gentle with God's smaller creatures when, peering at them, I think, "They are watching me looking at them." Even more gentle when I contemplate that when another creature & I are looking at each other, God is observing us both: the ultimate Eye in the sky is not a satellite camera.

1 One of the blessings of a mature, Eriksonian-generative old age clearly is that one becomes less conscious of being looked at by other human beings & consequently more free to look, to observe more objectively, with at least slightly more ego-transcendence. A proof of this is that I am now being told, often, to pay more attention to "how you look in public." But if the more the body sags earthward the spirit soars heavenward, the old become increasingly aware of being ceaselessly under the unsleeping Eye of God, the only eye that is omniperspectival: I cannot take up a coign of vantage from which God is not, at the same time, looking. Of course not everybody believes in the Big Snoop. The Bible & I do.

2 Phototechnics have wonderfully advanced our human ability to see from multiple P.O.V.s. Four black Angelenos are now in prison not because a helicopter saw them drag a random white man out of his truck & almost beat him to death but because on-the-ground camcorders in private hands clearly showed the four faces. (This beating set "race relations" back at least as far as the Rodney King beating, white on black, set them forward, if it did.) The de-jure, legal P.O.V. is having its cage rattled by de-facto photography & its public-video nth-degree projection, television. And let all God's people say, Amen! Caution: In relation to every technological advance the public is at first naive. Now it's time for us to sophisticate our eyeballs as to what we video-see. The parallel in literary studies is "reader-response criticism," a development from philosophy (especially epistemology) of science: observation pollutes experiements, so the reader pollutes the text--& so the viewer pollutes television, whose clips & bytes have already been pre-polluted (pre-chewed) by the controllers behind the tube (both in video content & in audio interpretation). Again the hermeneutics of suspicion, folks. Shocked I was that otherwise sophisticated thinkers rushed to condemn the "Rodney King" jury on the ground that the section of camcorder tape the video-controllers chose to air "plainly showed police brutality." Rushing to condemn a jury is itself an act of lawlessness & a vote for anarchy.

3 When in a group a few days ago I said, of a population segment, "They all look alike," everybody instantly got the joke & laughed. But it's what I'm reading-hearing right now from Columbus-bashers, who romanticize the Amerinds who "discovered Columbus" as look-alike gentle folk of what used to be called "natural-man" virtues. This defamation/angelization a century ago found a phrase in Swinburne, who said of Spain in the Americas "her sins and sons through sinless lands dispersed." Against this doubly unfair utopianism, Russell Redgate recently said: "This image of the contamination and ruin of an innocent, gentle, nature-worshipping people by corrupt Europeans with their perverted notions of sin and their terrible God of Wrath is a lie." A white lie, may be. But are we to preach-teach compassion instead of truth?

4 Well, what did those Tainos hope for when from the shore they saw Columbus disembark? For one thing, deliverance from their fierce, cannibalistic neighbors to the south, the Caribs ("cannibal" being Carib for people-eating people). The only somewhat good Europeans might save good Indians from bad ones, "good"

& "bad" not just from the P.O.V. of the Europeans but also of the Tainos. When on his second voyage Columbus landed to the south, he found confirmation of the Tainos' fear of the Caribs: butchered human remains, boys castrated & fattened for cooking, girls kept to produce babies, which the Caribs considered a great delicacy. Slightly better known among us are the horrors later Spaniards came upon: Aztec human sacrifices, their worship including also the eating of human flesh & drinking of human blood. Why could so few Spaniards crush the Aztec empire? Because many Aztec-oppressed tribes joined forces with Spain's imperial force against that Native American empire emcompassing more than 350 towns whose temples sacrificed 350,000 human beings annually (Aztec law requiring the sacrifice of at least 1,000 per temple; in 1487, at the dedication of the new temple in what is now Mexico City, 80,000 people were sacrificed in four days). The Spanish didn't believe in religious freedom: they forbade human sacrifice as well as cannibalism & promoted a gentler, more humane faith taking the form of Franciscan missions. Give 'em credit: the conquistadors were liberators, not just conquerors; & the Columbus quincentennial should honor them for that. Did they use excessive force ("brutality")? Those they liberated thought not. Did they spread diseases both among the Amerinds & Amerind diseases (esp. syphilis) when they got back home? Yes, but unwittingly, without malicious intent.

5 When I'm trying to be fair to both, to see each from their own P.O.V., partisans for Native Americans think I'm being partisan to Columbus & successive waves of Europeans. When I'm trying to be fair about the RKE (Rodney King Event), I'm accused of being a racist. Tongue-in-cheek generalization: Those who are for "justice" are against fairness, though fairness is the only road to justice (& peace, for how can there be peace without truth?)....The dismal reality of the present polarized partisanships is that racism is now more acceptable & "solidarity" is coming to mean multicultural enclavism (pluralistic diversity without mutuality). Our crisis of P.V.O. truth over- & under-lies our crises of race & class.