

IN WHAT COMPARISON WITH WHOM?

THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE ONE'S COMPARISONS ----- ELLIOTT #2066

This thinksheet is about a generally neglected human freedom: individually and collectively, we are free to choose the mood, the mode, and the humans (persons and groups) in comparing ourselves with others. More startling still, we even have the freedom to choose whether to make such comparisons: "You are looking at the outward appearance....It's when the Lord thinks well of you that you're approved, not when (by comparing yourselves with others) you think well of yourself" (2Cor.10.7-18).

1. Sooner or later, everybody's an underdog. I had the uprorious experience of playing Top Dog / Underdog with Fritz Perls at Esalen Institute --freeing partly because it increased awareness of the fact that your vertical self-location as dog has only such importance as you give it. And I can still hear Viktor Frankl saying, time and again in my hearing, "No one can ever remove from you the freedom to choose the attitude you will take toward whatever your situation." Those two psychiatrists, so radically different both in lifestyle and in teaching style, were concerned about transpolitical freedoms. I thank God for studying under them ("under," please not "with"!), and I feel it a duty to try to convey--in our present (July/86) political captivity of "freedom" and "liberation"--their critical-compassionate release from imprisonment in Aristotle's paradigm of man as "political animal."

2. "Transpolitical" (humanity as political +), not "apolitical": I'm against copping out on any of our human powers and responsibilities--so I'm allergic to quietism, pacifism, institutional celibacy, and all other ideological and institutional automatic no-no's to human action. Willis is not freaking out on society, abandoning hope for pro-human social changes, in his old age. He is disillusioned not in the emotional sense (ie, discouraged) but in the cognitive sense: some of his earlier illusional simplisms have been surrendered to reality.

3. Instead of writing an essay on the three dimensions underlined in the intro to this thinksheet, I'm going anecdotal and analogical, at the risk of being accused of letting my lifestory, worldview, and present perspectives on human affairs determine my principles (yes, accused of being inductive!). Here goes....

(a) In my late teens, the illusion of the Perfect Book had to go. The surrender of this simplism was both inwardly and socially painful to me: I was forced both out of my internal scribal security and out of the caring church-and-school communities that would not tolerate my preaching of freedom in, with, and beyond the Bible. In recollection I have no regrets, only an ever-diminishing grief, pain, sorrow.

(b) I have surrendered the political dogma that "equality" is an essential ingredient in human dignity and in fairness. I abhor the subversion of reason by thoughtless strings of interidentified words like "justice," "dignity," "equality," "fairness," "liberation," "freedom," "God's option for the poor," "majority rule." As to the last, so many of my friends are for it in S.Africa and against it in N.Ireland. How can they think themselves honest, and even righteous, in crying for it in the one place and against it in the other? Me, I'm against it in both places. And if one identifies "democracy" with "majority rule" / "one person one vote" (though I don't), I'm against democracy in both places.

(c) I refuse the automatic lock-in that those who have less should struggle for what those who have more have, instead of being thankful they have more than those who have even less. Eg, black S.Africans had it better economically than any other S.African blacks and politically as good as most of them. Maybe they should struggle for all the S.African whites have. This thinksheet is about that "maybe."