

THE ROLE OF NEGATIVE INCENTIVES
TO SOCIETAL AGGLUTINATION:
THE GOOD NEWS OF OUTSIZE TROUBLES

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ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636

Phone 617.775.8008

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Robt. M. Hutchins, who in the early 1940s worked into the wee hours on the top floor of the U. of Chicago's Swift Hall (as I also was doing, in the next room), is remembered for his descriptive phrase, "the good news of damnation." One city-block away, under Stag Field stands (right where I used to play tennis), the world's first nuclear chain-reaction had just occurred, leading right on to Hiroshima. He was saying something like this: War is bad news for humanity, & The Bomb (as it was to be called) is bad news for war; syllogistically, The Bomb is good news for humanity. Hutchins is slowly becoming right after decades of looking wrong: The Bomb was the first world-class outsize trouble, pressuring the great powers & their small-powers entourages (many of these calling themselves "non-aligned") to crescendoing efforts at political containment of the otherwise physically unconfinable menace....This Thinksheet tropes RMH's phrase, extending it to include the more recently developing world-class negative incentives toward the world-level handling of global problems largely caused, as was the Atomic Age, by hypertrophied science-technology. (By hypertrophy, I mean not that science-technology developed too fast in itself, but that it has relative to the slower developmental pace of the human internal (psychospiritual) & external (ecopolitical) ability to control and utilize the scientific-technological process & products for the good of humanity & the biosphere.) THESIS: God is at least on the side of the pressures, negative as well as positive, for the world-addressing of world-size problems; and since where you stand is where you sit, humanity will learn to stand together by thus being nudged into sitting down together. With some steps in between (including, I think, my Christian eschatology--but that's another subject!) Babel will yield to the New Jerusalem, Paradise (Persian for "garden") Lost to Paradise Regained. Humanity will learn to submit its chaos unto freedom, perfect liberty being (as Fosdick saith) perfect obedience to the perfect law, to (Dante in the PARADISO) *l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle* ("the Love that moves the sun and the stars," so-called at the end of THE DIVINE COMEDY's last book; at the beginning, *colui che tutto move*, "Who moves all things").

1. Dante's mystical convergence of "all things" on the biblical God had predecessors (the Prophets, Jesus & the early Christians, the Christian Neoplatonists of the millenium up to Dante) & successors (incl. Teilhard, whose mystical earth-globe is now reversing from divergence to the equator to convergence on the poles). One hears from many quarters, sacred & secular, sentiments reminding one of the Gospel of John's "that they may all be one, Father" (17.21). Various world-peace movements using various neutral symbols & sacraments are catching the attention of sophisticates & "the masses" alike--such as one I'm involved with, called "Earthgarden." Do I believe (in the words of Jn. Ciardi's two-word poem) that "Man can"? No, I believe humanity can, & should, try; & that the grace of God will infuse such efforts &, in ways beyond my notions of evangelism, illumine them. ("Beyond," not without: that's the kind of evangelical I am.) I'm not directly involved, however, in Luddite peace movements ("Down with nukes!"): they are ambiguous irritants buzzing around the psywar tables where the game of weapons chips is perpetually--and within the conditions of history, necessarily--played.

2. The story is told, & I'm inclined to believe it, that we (humanity) once intercommunicated only by grunts out of the biggest hole in our heads (in addition, of course, to body-language). The grunts agglutinated ("glued" together) into sentences, the words developing structural modifiers (Noam Chomsky's essential grammar) as signals of their interrelations (conjugations, declensions, pre-in-suf-/fixes). In the Thinksheet's title, I've made a metaphor of this process: we as per-^{over}

sons & as societies so develop, as indeed does the brain of each one of us (the exfoliation of the dendritic system, with geometric-synaptic explosion). Yes, I'm sneaking in my version of the cosmological argument for the existence of God, along with my coeval philosophy of history. (No one who thinks can evade giving some account of order as well as chaos & some sense-making story attempting to illumine history. This fact is a good place to begin a dialog with "secular humanists" & indeed, with all who are concerned as to how our society can, in fairness both to our children & to our heritages, include this depth dimension in public education.)

3. Global outside troubles--declining environmental quality (including, just yesterday, the report that polar ozone protection this summer was 10% lower than the previous record), inclining population (now more than ever before entitled to be called an explosion), the present biosphere-dooming definition of "development" (with attendant moral as well as ecopolitical perplexities)--are eroding the sense-making power (1) of the myth of national sovereignty & (2) of traditional national & racial animosities & (3) of clashing ideologies. UN speeches are beginning to sound, to the general public as they long have to various specialists in the human sciences, less and less real, less & less of "the real world." The speaker, whoever, has no clothes. In this ironic way, the UN is serving a divine purpose (Gn.3.31: "Who told you that you were naked?"). We are going to be seeing, first around the edges & then at the center of the UN, more & more courage to speak the truth beyond the myths, more & more transcultural-transbloc-transideological talk.

4. The breakdown of ideology is clearest, & most effectively bespoken, in the larger nations. Ortega defends his Sandinista hegemony with a direct ideological appeal: "You can't have a revolution that is not Marxist." But "Red" China (recently, in the Communist Party's PEOPLE'S DAILY) is now out-&-out anti-ideological: "Our greatest mistake since 1949 was leftism....We cannot and will not undertake political campaigns of class struggle." (Says Flora Lewis, NYT, this was in the editorial celebrating the 38th ann. of the Chin. revolution "and explaining issues to be decided at the party congress later this month," Oct/87). More FL: "Gorbachev...too is beginning to nibble at the edges of sacrosanct dogma and old habits....These are momentous developments coming at the close of a century whose greatest tragedies stemmed from ideologies. They suggest that we are still focusing on arguments that are outmoded and will be of little concern to the generation that will come of age in the next century....the chance of a shift to awareness of common problems may be nearer" than most people think.

5. Two more corroborating scenes:

(1) CAPE COD. The populace, rapidly having its consciousness raised as to the intratability of Cape-wide ecological problems under our present seven-independent-towns system, is giving increasing credence to those of us who are crying out for Cape-wide government at the points of Cape-wide problems (the towns system elsewhere continuing).

(2) SOUTH AFRICA. Reagan is against continuing sanctions, both as ineffectual (vis-a-vis apartheid) & as counterproductive (hurting blacks). What's softening the ideology of apartheid is not counter-ideology (eg, "democracy" as pitched internally or from abroad) but the economic reality that blacks for a generation have been weighing ever heavier in the economy. I've been pro-investment & anti-divertment all along: an economically healthy S.African economy steadily improves the black presence in organized labor & submanagement. I'm ashamed at the backwardness of the churches in sanctifying ideologs like Tutu.