

The wording of this Thinksheet's title displays my conviction that the world will never outgrow the need to use the ancient Persians' metaphysical-moral vision (despite Khomeini's foreign Arabic fundamentalism). The peopling of the Other World with (Bonhoeffer) the bright and dark powers is a moral requirement of seriousness about life in This World. My preferred language for this seriousness, on both "Sides" (as the Germans say: Diese und Jene) is God/Satan: we have to do, now and in an indeterminate tomorrow, with good & evil in personal dimension, in personal relation; we humans are responsible & in this sense dignified actors in a-and-the cosmic drama: we are part of, contributors to, the Big-Picture staging and acting of the Big Story....This thinksheet is a late-Nov/86 reflection on this vis-a-vis Iranuagate (the evil that has come upon the USA through the White House attempt to "do good" through the National Security Council bypass of Congress & the Cabinet & the State Department & the Pentagon) and Pretoropia (the evils descending upon S.Africa from the West's idealistic-utopian pressures on S.Africa's white government to let itself be replaced by a black government).

1. A funny thing sometimes happens to good/evil people as they set their minds to doing good. The evil dimension in human nature, however you describe it, tries to--and often succeeds!--get in its licks. In the Jewish commentative tradition it's often called by a sharp, insightful, descriptive phrase: "the evil impulse," defeasible by combining "a worldly occupation" with "study of Torah" (81, Judah Goldin, THE LIVING TALMUD: THE WISDOM OF THE FATHERS, New Am. Library/55/57). Cf. Paul's "sin that lives in me" (Ro.7.20). It's in the interest of Renaissance-Enlightenment man to obscure the very fact of this dark side of human nature, and this obscuration is one of the last characteristics to go when adolescent liberalism painfully yields to mature realism. An ambiguous value of Jung, in liberal subcultures, is that his "shadow" language provides a non-imperial-ego-diminishing way of referring to the evil within... ambiguous in that while it restores evil (which Freudianism denies) to the metaphysical-moral vision, it manages evil by the manipulation of individual consciousness (rather than, as in biblical religion, by obedient relating to the forgiving God): the solution is gnostic, with all the limitations of ancient & modern gnosticism.

2. A few minutes before we left the West Coast yesterday*, our 4½-year-old grandson said "God is the most powerful, because love is the strongest, and God is love....(pause) I'm the strongest because I can throw anybody over my shoulder." Reminds me of the bromide that religion is more about clarity than about therapy. This tiny grandchild of ours, in his two-breath self-contradiction, was unclear about distinguishing the divine/human and the self/other. Amusing. But not amusing when persons of power assume godlike prerogatives as "innocent" punishers (of Managua, or Pretoria) & saviors (of Contras, or S.African blacks). * 2 Dec 86

3. Two days ago our son Bill was showing me diagrammatically how data get shaped into information, which gets then shaped into knowledge, which then gets shaped (along with other factors) into programs interacting with policies, which (I now add) interact with the operating paradigm or picture as to what it's all about in the particular company (or country or church or any other social structure). The paradigm in action is the motion picture, the story-in-process. Reverse Bill's flow and you get the story's own needs as the primary principle for selecting the data-information-knowledge "relevant" for defining the situation the story is then circularly

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used to "explain" or at least "illumine." It's both an inspiring & a frightening fact of the human potential: once a story gets a two-handed grip on us as persons/institutions/societies/cultures, any attack on the story will rally "all hands" and all energies to the story's defense. The story has acquired numinous-divine potency & authority, and those ~~who are held in its~~ grip will defend it with divine-demonic fury. All cultures are aware of this story-potential; cf, in the West, "Nemesis-Moira-Dike-Judgment"; in the East, "Karma." Let's call it an AutoStory, meaning a story that does its own thing, has a life of its own (and so a momentum of its own) and a morality of its own (including a hermeneutic that "understands" opposition to the AutoStory to be immoral). Once the AutoStory is yours (ie, once you're its!), your obedience will be both uncritical (ie, unthinking) & obsessive. The demons have taken over what the angels began.

4. A "cover story" is either the particular story the mag is featuring in this issue or a tale told ^{to} conceal--presumably the reverse of the first meaning. "The news" these days is a jumble of cover stories (both senses) almost entirely under the control of Auto-Stories about "the White House" and "S.Africa." Would that the churches were doing as much critical thinking (ie, AutoStory challenging) on the latter as the media are on the former. At least one reason it's not so is that the churches are better positioned to punish deviance (deviation from the party-line AutoStory on an issue) than the government is to punish the media. (The spine of Scripture is prophetism, the record of what "prophet" deviants had to say and the price they had to pay for saying it: all communities "hedge" themselves against change, and religious communities are the best at it.)

5. While coercive power is advantaged by courageous action without critical thinking ("critical consciousness"), persuasive power needs both. Reagan's thinking is ad-hoc, intuitive, impulsive, so "the White House" overvalues coercive power, including the bypassing of Federal structures & statutes intended to "hedge" against impulse & to favor critical thinking. Coercive successes go to one's head, and before one knows it one is on a coercive roll. It's human, not just governmental: flushed with Martin-Luther-King-Jr. success, the Am. churches are preaching the coercing of Pretoria, as though the situations were parallel. In the Fall/86 TODAY'S MINISTRY (ANTS), an Andover-Newton trustee, just returned from S.Africa, asks why the churches are focusing on divestment instead of education, jobs, & housing--and explains that it's because television has gotten Am. Christians to look at S.Africa violence.

6. It's esp. dangerous for "the arrogance of power," to use Sen. Fulbright's booktitle, when church & state share the same AutoStory, as now on "S.Africa." Neither, in that case, can "hedge" against the demons at work in the other. (I'm putting quotes around "hedge" because it's a great talmudic analogy of multivalent wisdom.) The same calamity is upon us when the government goes "bipartisan" and loses the built-in adversariality of our two-party system; and when "the separation of powers" isn't working to "hedge" the country against the demons of hubris with its attendant blindness & deafness.

7. Well, isn't our Christian Story an AutoStory? Only when, perversely, the church impedes instead of promoting critical-prophetic consciousness. See Cullen Murphy's magnificent ATLANTIC Dec/86 cover-story on Jesus....What if, instead of win/lose, the churches were to work for win/win in S.Africa (the blacks winning without the whites losing)?