

The old judgmentalism was the negative side of the old morality. In the 1960s at Esalen Institute & other human-potential centers & many other less "far out" places, I heard "judgmental" used pejoratively as the rejective term for all opposition to the incoming permissive, hedonistic tide. It was a romantic, Cavalier, love-is-all time, when imperfect love doctrinairely cast out all other values, especially fear. But now the pendulum is beginning to swing from Cavalier to Puritan. Driven by fears of personal, interpersonal, & public moral-ethical rot, we are becoming judgmental again, but (I hope) without losing what we learned in that romantic decade & the subsequent score of years....This Thinksheet is some notes on the fear component of the new judgmentalism.

1 Hearing I'm a contrarian, somebody yesterday asked "But you're not negative: isn't a contrarian somebody who's against everything?" "Not my kind," said I; "my kind is only contrary to anything added/subtracted that diminishes human dignity--eg, adding genital freedom or leaving God out." (Why these two examples? Because in that time, & subsequently, I've seen so much misery & spiritual poverty from both. Now, fears of the former--most dramatically, pregnancy & AIDS--are having a little effect; but how induce fear of the latter when almost everybody in America believes "God [if any] is love," ergo, nothing to fear? But even at that minimalism, is love nothing to fear? What, indeed, is more to be feared than love & its consequences? As fire is to be feared, for love is the fire of both body & soul.)

2 The electorate is becoming surly toward (dirty word!) "incumbents" who instead of fearing dishonor fear their constituents & thus focus their attention not on public service but on getting reelected. Yes, the public is hypocritical, wanting Walter-Mondale forthright honorableness & no new taxes but voting for read-my-lips dishonor: we get what's coming to us, because what goes around comes around. I welcome this hypocrisy as better than being so anomic-anarchic as not even to give lip-honor to the Walter Mondales who tell it like it is (in his case, 1984 "We cannot deal with the deficit without raising taxes"). Now people of the new judgmentalism are beginning to see themselves in the mirror of those they've elected to office at all levels of government. The more critical attitude applies not just to matters of fiscal & political probity but also to personal morality: Gary Hart was shocked to find that whereas his hero JFK got away with genital freedom, he couldn't.

3 Higher **moral taste** is another element in the new judgmentalism. Lenny Bernstein, who died last week, helped, by bridging classical & contemporary music, to raise the general public's music appreciation, & good music of all kinds is, partly because of his remarkable life, more available than ever before in history (of course along with junk music, chewing gum for the ear holes). The fine arts are better funded & attended than ever before. And great art, even near great, does ennoble the soul, contribute to human dignity. I remember Rainer Maria Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo," in which the poet is so overwhelmed by the glowing beauty that the headless, limbless stone seems more than alive, its esthetic powers "breaking out of all its contours / like a star: for there is no place / that does not see you. You must change your life." (Note the spooky feeling that the sculpture is all eyes, like the omniscience of God. This is the extreme opposite of the anomic personality, for whom anything goes because nobody's watching.)

4 "Judgmental," RHD²: "1. involving the use or exercise of judgment; 2. tending to make moral judgments...(1905-10)." The first meaning is objective-etymological, the second is ~~characterological~~--as, of the 16 Jungian personality types, the 4 ending in "J." Moses smiting the Egyptian, Jesus denouncing hypocrites, & Israel's prophets in between. In lax times & places, such persons are considered at least unpleasant. One of them, Jn. Silber, is now trying to become governor of MA though having offended almost everybody (except the voters?).

5 "Critical consciousness" in the various social movements is a further aspect of

the new judgmentalism. What was ironic, though not odd, about these heightened awarenesses of "oppression" was that (1) participants in the movements were not **self**-critical unless only vis-a-vis the particular oppression the particular movement existed to resist, (2) "the oppressor" seemed to be everybody not in the movement, & (3) the psychosocial function of the particular critical-consciousness was at least as much to alienate participants from the surrounding society as to deliver the particular oppressed. Between the private & public moralities of many in the movements there was a great gulf fixed. The sinners were other people. Lustily they sang "Amazing Grace!" but without personal repentance & faith. The movements were more rebellion than reformation, but there were some positive results. I was very much "a movement person," but didn't get to be in any category of oppressed: most of "the oppressed" considered my category, the white male, the oppressor. Some in my category fell into the bathos of hit-me-again self-hate: never I. But I was self-critical enough to make some changes.

6 It seems to me that three **modes & moods of judgment** correspond with Tillich's three successive modes of experiencing God. And three plays pop into my mind: (1) God the void (Sam. Beckett, "Waiting for Godot"); (2) God the enemy (Harold Pinter, "The Birthday Party"); & (3) God the friend (Christopher Fry, "The Boy with the Cart"). Of the three plays, judgment & fear occur only in "The Birthday Party," in which, in a Kafkaesque way, a human being, oppressed by accusations, dissolves into disabling fear. It was not grace that taught the protagonist's heart to fear, & grace did not relieve his fears. As in the first stanza of "Amazing Grace!" he was--and remained--a "blind," "lost" "wretch." His tormenters led him away, but grace did not lead him home. In the first & third plays, judgment is implied. In "Godot," judgment as God's absence is mixed not with fear but with despair. And in "Cart," the judgment falling on those who fail to understand young St. Brendan is mixed not with fear but with confusion, & the boy's mood is blissful trust & hope.

7 **Grace-less** judgmentalism is hard, censorious, moralistic even when permissive, legalistic even when libertarian. By contrast, the judgmentalism of forgiven sinners is grace-ful, the heart more eager to forgive than the mind is to condemn, though neither canceling the other. "The fellowship of Christian love" includes confrontation in being "like to that above." But the new judgmentalism is often graceless, with nonnegotiable demands, one-sided "debates," & single-issue politics. The secular self-righteous are as disgusting & maddening as the pious self-righteous. Time was when I suffered more from the fundamentalist mentality on the right; of late, as much from that on the left. Tom Wolfe (THE BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES, Bantam/88, 586) says, of "touchstone issues in the black community" & "divestiture and South Africa," "You suggest there might be two sides, and you're not even-handed, you're biased." (This satiric novel is a masterpiece of off-the-wall new judgmentalism. The fear of God is no medieval superstition but a present experience--in the index I made, 235f, 338, 396, 474, 511, 582, 598, 654. The choice, he says, is between "the high ground of the Divine" or "the pointless bathos" of sentimentality & individualistic romanticism on the slippery slope into private & public corruption.)

8 **Humor**, though it can be cruel, when driven by goodwill humanizes judgment by tempering, & so humanizing, the raw emotions of anger, fear, guilt, & shame. In my personal subject-index to "Bonfire," I've just finished rereading all the references to these gut feelings & have some additional conclusions: (1) The power of this novel lies in the author's courageous treatment of these feelings when at gale force, as they often are in this NYC epic in which WASP Sherman McCoy is a downside Odysseus journeying with horrors without joys; (2) Mores, morals, ethics, & law cannot long successfully evade honest dealing with the full range of these feelings in the full range of human situations; & (3) "Bonfire," as postFreudian, cleverly defeats all modern evasions & denials of anger, fear, guilt, & shame--this defeating being a characteristic of the new judgmentalism....Only when humor is in harness with **faith** can it be free from captivity to cynicism. Tom Wolfe's faith is undefined but vigorous. He's saying nothing's working as it should, which is something sayable only by someone with a vision, & therefore a hope, of how things should work. (Is not the Lord's Prayer, besides being a prayer, a vision of how things should work?)