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MORALIZING "FATE" TO DEPERSONALIZE RETRIBUTION

A democratic nation, like a person with free will, has some control over its destiny. If it denies wrongdoing and flees from moral responsibility, that nation surrenders to Fate's retribution; but if its people are moved to root out corruption, that nation can overcome its past and shape its future.

Some folks think Safire is up to no good most of the time, but I think he's up to good most of the time. Including today, though this Thinksheet is to pick at that language-master's language. This clipping is the first ¶ of his "free will vs. winds of Fate":

1. Notice first his holophrastic (God-substitutional) **capitalization** of "Fate." That tips off his God-hating & God-evading readers (only two classes of his readers!) to two truths: (1) He's gentlemanly sensitive to their delicate feelings about the word "God"; & (2) His God-euphemism, "Fate," takes over the West's traditional divine territory.

2. Hitler had one way of getting rid of the Jews, Safire the Jew has another. By the miracle of language conversion, at which he has no superior, he upstages Philo & the other creators of Hellenistic Judaism: he abandons both Jewish & Hellenistic-Jewish speech for God & substitutes Hellenic-Hellenistic. In short, **"God" is gone.** He has let the Jew in him become self-seduced into losing the struggle for respectability....It reminds me of Swedes today using "poem" instead of "prayer," as when the Bp. of Stockholm was stopped on the streets that the citizenry might praise him for the prayer he'd written on the occasion of the assassination of PM. Olaf Palme (he, Krister Stendahl, now ex-bp., giving this illustraton when I asked him about the current avoidance of God-talk in Sweden).

3. Late Judaism (3rd c. BC/BCE - Ist c. AD/CE) & early Christianity appealed to their flocks & for followers (proselytism, evangelism) by pointing to God/Jesus as **Deliverer from fate.** In her recent ADAM, EVE, AND THE SERPENT, Elaine Pagels documents the early (till Augustine) Christian joyful experience of liberation from fate, the fates, the impersonal-depersonalizing weaving & grinding faceless & merciless forces randomly confusing & confounding humanity, messing up lives & relationships, defeating all searchings for meaning, dooming the individual to oblivion (unless by the mystery cults brought ecstatically into the hope of immortality). Jesus' resurrection (the Christus Victor theme beautifully exposited by Gustav Aulen) defeated "the powers," the fates, & set the faithful to humming with the angels in Christian worship.

4. Let's note another Safire conversion: he corrupts "fate" with the two biblical notes of (1) **God the Judge** & (2) human **freedom & therefore responsibility.** I speak, of course, from the pagan standpoint: eisegeting those two notes into "fate" destroys the twin essence of fate, viz, that it is both (1) μοῖρα (moira), an inelectable, impersonal determinism operating through cause/effect chains of dubious moral content, so that from below, seen through human eyes, whatever "cosmos," pattern, may exist looks more like luck & chance than like purpose & plan--though humanity has within this determinism two freedoms, viz, (a) to see trouble as the effect of "hubris," the transgressing of one's "telos" ("end" in both senses, viz, pattern & limits), & (b) to take an affirmative & hopeful attitude toward whatever happens to you (the stance of the late Stoics & of Viktor Frankl's "logotherapy," "will to meaning"); and (2) ἀνάγκη (anagke), necessity, unfreedom & therefore fatalism (a philosophy & attitude unrelieved by the hope of finding, & learning from, cause/effect sequence patterns; & thus the expression "blind fate") & pessimism (the fruit of fatalism, as optimistic faith is the fruit of theism). [Compare, in Islam, "kismet."]

5. Of course I praise Safire for so corrupting "fate"! His great biblical convictions of retribution & responsibility ill fit the pagan word but well fit the human condition within the conditions of history. How sad, though, that he cannot bring himself to give credit where credit is due, "sanctifying the Name" (as the great Jewish & Christian phrase [the first line in the Lord's Prayer] has it), connecting past with present & prospects! Why must he say "we tempt Fate by running from responsibility" when the content of his surreptitious sermon is resoundingly biblical? And if his switch from biblical to pagan language is so as to communicate with pagans, can he fool them without cheating them & compromising his own soul?