

FROM VALUES TO VIRTUES TO VISION

The people, any people, may have values & virtues, but
 "where there is no vision, the people perish"
 (Pr.29.18KJV; NRSV: "Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint");
 TEV: "A nation without God's guidance is a nation without order"; NIV: "...revela-
tion..."; REV/-B: "with no one in authority..."). (Underlinings mine.)

Only 4 Heb. wds.! Wise-sayings, proverbs, in all cultures are inclined to be cryptic, a feature intensified in Pr(overbs) by the compaction of the Heb(rew) language. But another feature of Heb. compensates, viz. the usual patency, obviousness, of the physical base of abstract ideas. That base, here, is **thunder-bolts, lightning-flashes**, without which, on a dark night, no (physical) "vision" ("good vision" as something you need to get your driver's license). Think of the idioms, metaphors, similies (on the last, e.g., "It struck me like a bolt of lightning").

When some thought "strikes" us suddenly, we're more apt to ask ourselves "Where did that come from?" than when a thought emerges slowly as the product of some thought-process. A lightning-flash is an electrical transfer with cloud-charge & earth-distance as factors. You might say, lightning occurs when the sky hangs low. Well, so does revelation, which is rare now because, in a secular culture, the sky is too high. Paul's conversion shows the convergence of physical/spiritual (Ac.9.3: "suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him"). In my Eng.-Heb. dictionary, "vision" gets me, as the 2nd meaning, Pr.'s wd. for "lightning-flash."

This Thinksheet presupposes that human beings need something more than values and virtues. That Something More is what I've been talking about thus far. Without that Something More, the soul shrivels & society--as ours now--falls into disorder, chaos, anarchy, incivility, cynicism. But the Thinksheet is not about this premise; it's about the false hope of some that soul-&-social ills can be cured by attention to, education in, values & virtues. In saying the hopes are false, I'm no grinch; I'm a realist, & optimistic as more & more the falsity is becoming clear to more & more Americans.

1 My first experience of Sidney Simon & his "values clarification" was with him in a teachers' convention in a parochial school whose nuns seemed delighted with this fresh approach to what looked like values education, though to me it was obvious that the method was not more than consciousness-raising about, & voicing without evaluating, various values. Using case-method (several cases), he got a bunch of 7th graders to perform predictably. Reminded me of a lion tamer with as many lions, on as many stands. Case after case, the chn. ventilated their feelings (called "values") under control of his values: nonjudgmentality, self-expression as virtuous in itself, the pedagogical dialectic, the Enlightenment priority of reason. The process was successful as values clarification: it clarified, for all to behold, his values, though it left the ad hoc class in values chaos.

2 Next stage, virtues (20 some years after "values": will "vision" come in 20 some years after "virtues"?). How one relates virtues/values reveals what one's up to: definitions of such words show intentions. An **elitist** tends to identify the two: virtue as excellence, merit, perfection, absorbs virtue as goodness, morality, rectitude. In sports elitism, the fact that O.J.Simpson is "good" (i.e., excellent at his sport) made jury-selection difficult: defense wanted prospects who were so impressed with that "good" as to incline to believe O.J. "good" in the other sense (i.e., moral, honorable, loyal, honest, certainly no murderer). The **pragmatist** sees value as worth. Elitist: "good at"; pragmatist: "good for." And the **ethicist**: plain "good" (inner virtue, character, piety as sanctity [personal holiness]).

3 Everybody has some effortlessly exercised native-gift **values** which, were effort required & made, would be **virtues**. Some, by excess exercise & insensitivity to the consequences for others, make vices of their natural values & even of their acquired virtues. **Vision**, only vision, has the power to cohere those values & those virtues. I think of several ancient ethicists, West & East, who used here the analogy of the charioteer driving-guiding his horses. No charioteer (vision), no author-ity, no guidance, no race. (Review the italic ¶ at this Thinksheet's beginning.)

4 Think of a triangle whose angles are named by the nouns in this Think-sheet's title: you may start at any one angle & move 'round the triangle in either direction. The reverse of the movement indicated in the title is this: from vision to virtues to values (or values to virtues). The cultural revolutionary version of that is from countercultural **vision** to antivirtues to antivalues. Call it the swing from Apollonian to Dionysiac or from Puritan to Cavalier. E.g.:

Hawthorne (d.1864), descendant of strict Puritans & born in Salem where an ancestor was the anti-witches magistrate. His rebellious vision (as in THE SCARLET LETTER, 1850) was of a lightened-up New England, with kindlier virtues & more natural values.

Ibsen (d.1906), whose vision of human rights made him an anticonventionalist in both virtues & values (panned in GHOSTS [1881]). In A DOLL'S HOUSE (1879), Nora abandons storgic (dutiful) love of husband & chn. to do her thing, whatever that turns out to be in her search to find out who she really is--though Ibsen denied he was being a social critic: he was, he said, only using for art actual human beings whom he'd met.

Woodstockers, to use that '60s event as a metaphor for antiestablishment antimorals, a libertine vision (especially in sex) now dominant in the American entertainment industry, whose moguls are grown-up (?) Woodstockers. (In the Fall/94 SCP NEWSLETTER, Brooks Alexander has a keen analysis of this mentality: "Since Hollywood directs our attention, virtue is on the defensive in society." "Hollywood and New York [i.e., movies and TV] are the major purveyors of gender-confusion, sexual rebelliousness, and aggressive hedonism in general.") Commercially overheated libido has washed out two dams, two solid facts: (1) For the individual, sexual intercourse is not a need; (2) Repressing libido (i.e., avoiding coitus) is not bad for you. Today the counter-counterculture, the backlash, is beginning to rebuild the reality-dams that make social life livable.

5 **Virtues** are self-habituated values. To the Gk.-Ro. classic virtues (reason controlling the passions)--fortitude, temperance, prudence, justice--also called the cardinal & natural (e.g., Ro.1.28-32, Gal.5.19-23, Col.3.12-14), Christianity added (1Cor.13) faith, hope, love (the last, says Augustine, the source of all Christian virtues). And truthfulness (not easy: lying works because the ability to deceive is superior to the ability to perceive). And equanimity, so rare in our hostile, abusive, assaultive society. Gratitude, humility, obedience, & (as the ads say) more!

6 Can the **public schools** agree on a list of values-virtues for moral ed? I must've read 50 suggested lists, but only Amitai Etzioni's two are unchallengeable: (1) self-control (but in what particulars & to what end[s]?) & (2) empathy (but within what limits?). The problem is that every proposed set promotes some particular paradigm/vision/jurisprudence. E.g., consider three rival virtues (in boldface):
 Humans are sinners in need of repentance toward **obedience**.
 Humans are victims in need of empowerment toward **self-esteem**.
 Humans are dependents in need of individuation toward **autonomy**.

Since law (a community's laws) is the directive-coercive agency of a social order informed by a particular paradigm (values-&-virtues way of seeing "the world") & empowered by that paradigm's vision (ideal of how things should be in & for society), & since the public schools are to prepare law-abiding, law-creating citizens, & since religion is a paradigm's deepest root & sanction, life-forming moral ed can occur only within a communal life inclusive of all these factors. See Dale Segrest, CONSCIENCE AND COMMAND: A Motive Theory of Law, Scholars Press/94....In the past year, all our major periodicals have dealt with this problem area. E.g., (1) the 13 June 94 NEWSWEEK (esp. the articles of Ken Woodward & Howard Fineman); (2) WSJ series. Now (8 Jan 95) the NYT has a whole section (4A) on it: "Education Life: Can Schools Teach Character?"--with many suggested virtue-lists, reminding me of the Jewish, Stoic, & Roman virtue/vice lists which the early Christians (e.g., in Sextus) sifted &, to what was retained, added specifically Christian motivators (sanctions), some of these listings appearing as early as the NT (e.g., Gal.5.22-23). See Wayne Meeks, THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIAN MORALITY (Yale/94).

7. The **Lord's Prayer** is a daily revisiting of our Christian vision, calling us to affirm the values & practice the virtues the vision, in the Spirit, energizes.