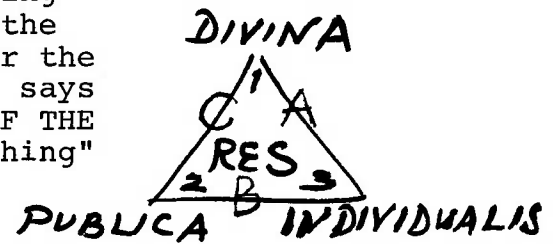


WESTERN CIVILIZATION, DYNAMISM OF:

"What is happening to...?" as shaping question.....Elliott #1222

In seeking a formulary to simplify grasping of the internal dynamism of "the West," the only civilization ever to have taken over the world (and still in process of doing so, says Wm. McNeill in his magnificent THE RISE OF THE WEST), I thought of Lat. *res*, meaning "thing" (e.g., in Fritz Perls' "I do my thing"), "area of concern." In Eng. it's powerful in the word "re(s)publican," meaning "the public thing" in contrast both



to the private-individual thing (in position #3 on my diagram, *res individualis*) and to the sacred-devotional-hieratic thing (in position #1 on my diagram, *res divina*). Except for being for Bryan, Wilson, and Stevenson, and against Nixon, my father was a lifelong "Re(s)publican," lifelong suspicious of "the Democrats" with their meddling-coddling concern for what's happening to "the individual." He tended to suck into "public" concern both the sacred and the personal: concern for "the public welfare" was the heart both of his religion and of his private life: he was a Jeffersonian-Lincolnian. His shaping question was *What is happening to the commonweal(th), the re(s)public, "the people" as the public thing (the social fabric reinforced by public pieties and threatened by private lusts and greeds), and (in this humane sense) "the government" (state at all levels, thus "the nation")?* Like the polis-minded ("political") Greeks and Romans, he saw education as a responsibility of the state and thus "civics" as the heart of the public-school system (and so was president of the school board) and "civility" as the heart of character (and so was every-way rough on me for my incivilities). In that public-school system then, respect for the teacher both as representative of *res publica* and as source-center of learning was demanded on pain of banishment (an earlier intervention which pre-eliminated "discipline problems," meaning classroom disruption). (Small physical pains were sometimes, rarely, inflicted; but the main pain-threat was the shame of ostracism.) The "citi-zen" was "a subject" of and therefore "subject" to *res publica*; and "civil" was the best adjective for religion (cf. Robt. Bellah's "civil religion"--and the thinksheet immediately preceding this one). In Lat., *res* means also "wealth": Jesus' saying that your heart is where your treasure is fits: my father's "wealth" in the sense of investment was primarily in the public wealth, "weal(th)fare," "welfare" (his concern for specie wealth, money, being powerful but secondary).

Now, as I am beginning to mature, the "re(s)publican" question *What is happening to res publica?* is deepening and widening (to "global") within me. Many of my values cluster around the "liberal" question at the heart of *res individualis*: *What is happening to individuals, persons, separate skin-bags?* I've leaned against relativizing person to "the public tranquility," thus against corporal punishment as pain (a position virtually rendering public education impossible) and as death (i.e., capital punishment; a position virtually rendering the prison system impossible)....Since age 12, the control question for me, however, has been *What is happening to res divina?*--in the Jewish idiom, "the Name" (the central Jewish sanction being the sanctification or hallowing of the Name, and thus central in Jesus' "the Lord's Prayer"). Jesus cannot be enlisted in either "liberal" or "republican" ranks: "bread" and "forgiveness" are secondary.