

* All my inherited/acquired/constructed paradigms/models are inadequate because both partial and distorted. I believe in the biblical revelation, and that it includes the darkneses this thinkshet is about.

THE POSTMODERN MIND: METAPHYSICAL MODESTY ----- ELLIOTT #1782

DEFINITIONS: This thinksheet's working defintions are these: The **primitive** mind, being unconscious that it knows that it knows and therefore unaware that it may be "knowing" amiss or inadequately, is not--cannot be--arrogant, immodest (since this vice can exist only in "double-minded" minds: antonym for "simple," both in Jewish and Christian Greek and, as "double-hearted," in OT Hebrew; and since this split way of seeing self/world increases one's potential for duplicity--a word using Latin for "double"--the connotation is usually negative, on which compare Indian-American "forked-tongued"). (In James and Hermes, the words *dipsychos*/-*ia* can be rendered "split-selved," "split self.") (Reaching for a distinctively technical term for the phenomenon when compulsive-unconscious, psychiatry made up, from two other Greek vocables, *schizo-phrenia*.)....The **classical** mind leans primitve in its awareness range but modern in its critical-creative dimension in religion, the arts, philosophy, and science....The **dogmatic** mind consciously self-limits to primitivity against the critical-creative dimension of the classical mind. (Examples: The current fundamentalist recrudescence in Islam; America's "Moral Majority"; antimodernism in Catholicism East and West, i.e., Orthodox and Roman.)....The **modern** mind, reacting against and resisting the "medieval" and "prescientific" dogmatic mind, restored Renaissance and Enlightenment values but did not escape the arrogance of the dogmatic mind: it was emotionally as sophomoric and metaphysically as immodest. When called "liberalism," it added the insult that others were enchained and the boast that it was "free" of bias against and enmity toward "the truth."....The **postmodern** mind is, as its very designation shows, in reaction against all prior minds but especially the modern mind. Of course being against everybody else is in itself a temptation to arrogance: no position in the great human conversation is demonproof. One expression for this mind, at an early stage of its American development, was "the chastened liberal mind." Against which, of course, certain thinkers arose to proclaim themselves "unchastened liberals."

1. I am a chastened primitive, modern, dogmatic, classical, postmodern mind--in that order. Having made a fool of myself in the modes of the other minds, I am now making a fool of myself with my version of the postmodern mind. Cynicism is one version of the postmodern mind: it is not mine. Antimetaphysical romanticism is another: it is not mine. Neomysticism is another: it is not mine. Another is neopythagoreanism, with the computer as its god and software as deus ex machina and commuensurability the touchstone of reality and number-versus-word formulations as its philosophical process: it is not mine.

2. My version of the postmodern mind--my mind at this the beginning of "1984"--has these components: (1) Nobody knows enough to justify killing anybody in the name of "truth"; the God of the Garden (Gn.3) has denied us promethean access to truth, and Adam and Eve's eating of the apricot succeeded only in creating in them the illusion that they'd come into possession of "the knowledge of good and evil." (2) In light of our essential ignorance of absolutes, "fear and trembling" should attend our decision-making on life/death issues--especially in areas of impenetrable complexity such as interpersonal intimacy and international relations (e.g., in both, scenarioing how the other will act). (3) Modest firmness is the proper mood/mode of action--firmness, because "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, that do with thy might" (Eccl.9.10 KJV; cf. Col.3.17,23; and 1Cor.10.31 KJV: "whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God"); and modesty, because my religion binds/frees me to the low self-esteem of one who, standing before God, is a "worthless servant" (L.17.10, run don't walk to the commentaries!); and, standing before fact/truth, is limited* in seeing/knowing/understanding by creaturliness, traumas, self-interest, fears,

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NOTE on trans--: This prefix flags the postmodern mind, in just now (e.g.) my use of "transdisciplinary." As flatland, the modern mind was antitranscendent because rationalistic: metaphysical transcendence is now back, in both respectable and zany forms. Transpersonalism is a new buzzword in psychology. And Transculture, Inc., is worth supporting.

frustrations, fantasies, yearnings (hopes, aspirations), goals. (4) Antianthropocentrism. While the Renaissance (in this case, Copernicus) delivered us from geocentrism (Ptolemy's sun-orbits-earth), and the Enlightenment weakened our historic paradigm of theocentrism, both movements paradoxically intensified anthropocentrism: homo sapiens became more consciously central, especially in philosophy (essentially, as Hume, Locke, Kant) and science (dynamically, as Darwin) and sociology (Spencer, Comte) and psychology (Freud, even Jung). To the dominant mind of the West, we humans passed from being the big show to being virtually the whole show--a self-inflation/infatuation which only now some hypertropies are deflating/disenchanting (e.g., nuclearism and global pollution as hypertropies of science, totalitarianism as an hypertrophy of statecraft, individualism as a hypertrophy of person-in-community, solipsism and nihilism as hypertrophies of knowing, Evolution-as-religion as hypertrophy of evolution-as-process). To my theocentric ("theistic") version of the postmodern mind, all anthropocentrisms are essentially deviant hypertrophies: since "modern" was essentially (whether or not professedly) atheist, I am "postmodern" in being theistic again (though atheists would call be "premodern"). STORY: I asked Gregory Baum, Canadian Catholic theologian, to teach at NYTS--who complained that I'd opened the Lay School faculty meeting with prayer: "I've gotten beyond that." I: "I got beyond that, too; but now I've gotten beyond being beyond that." As a Catholic neomodernist, he was irritated by my response, and I was amused at his irritation. (5) Anti-imperialisms of tribe, ideology, and academic disciplines:

(a) Tribal imperialisms violate my postmodern mind. The Holocaust, in the murder of 6 million Jews, is history's most spectacular *Stammeskampft*, struggle between tribes with intellectually fully developed metaphysical-historical grounding. Some conundrums, here, for me: While I loath Nazism as a reversion to the primitive mind in disdain of later developments, I admire Judaism for its retention of primitivity along with later developments--and, as a Christian, I gratefully share, as "revelation," that primitivity both as metaphysical understanding and as historical process-and-hope. I have a Christian postmodern mind. Side by side with my Jewish fellowbeliever, I have a biblical postmodern mind. (Odd: as I was writing this, a phoner caller asked me about the Barmen Declaration, the 1934 German antitribal statement in the mold of Barth's theology.)...Of all the peoples on earth, the Jews have dealt most thoroughly, even exhaustively, with questions of the relations of tribal/global, tribe/land, tribe/spirit, tribe/tradition (especially literary tradition). Jews today range from Israel-wrong (the spiritualists) to Israel-right-or-wrong (the jingoists).

(b) Ideological imperialisms violate my postmodern mind. Nazism was primarily blood-and-land, secondarily an ideology; but Communism was and is a trantribal ideology, as is the *laissez-faireism* against which it is a reaction. Ideologies answer all questions but solve few, and create many, problems. Whether driven by religious commitment or by economic or other theory, they cover the human condition no better than a handkerchief can cover a bed--though by fast motion one may create the illusion that the handkerchief is covering the bed.

(c) Academic imperialisms are, in "schools" (as movements and as institutions), what ideologies are in politics and tribes are in geography. Every department in every university cosmizes (explains the universe and life) from its own base and premises--so much so, so embarrassingly so, that we are moving from a minor corrective, viz., interdisciplinary work, to a major corrective, viz., transdisciplinary work. PARABLE: When I was a small child, I had a small-child friend who was given for Christmas a beautiful pocketknife which he boasted he could "do anything with." On New Year's Day, while using it as a screwdriver, he snapped the blade and dissolved into sobbing. Under the chastening of postmodernity, the best academics in all departments know their blades of hubris-omnicompetent claiming have been snapped. Psychologism and sociologism are passé and increasingly declassé, their loss of intellectual respectability the intellectual death-knell among the intelligentsia. Ditto for biologism (old-fashioned Darwinism) et al.