

METAPHYSICS, THE SMUGGLING & BRACKETING OF ----- ELLIOTT #1794

I can't recall a thinksheet with so dull-sounding a title, so dull-sounding that I despair of any readers--though there might be one, and that possibility is all the encouragement I need (especially seeing that my thinksheets are addressed to God, my own soul, and a minuscule public, in that order)...The theme, however, is vital to a diagnosis of the West's malaise as we begin 1984. The theme is this: The West's general education, and consequently its mentality, has been and is schizophrenic, mind-split along a faultline between SKEPTICISM and DOGMATISM.The intent is to describe the split and discern some of its baneful effects.

1. I applaud the scientific method, a dazzling spinoff late in intellectual history--so late that most of the human beings capable of sustained scientific thinking are alive today (the lesser number stretched out over the past million years, i.e., our species' history). At its heart is a fistful of asceses, deliberate deprivations on the faith that less is more, that bite-size is better than whole-hog. One of these essential deprivations ("bracketings," in the recent negative sense) is the setting aside of metaphysics (including theology). This particular bracketing-out was bloody-hard work intellectually (fighting against mind-ruts), morally (demanding courage to stand against "the authorities"), psychospiritually (resisting one's own social programming, including internalized tabus), and socially (violating social sanctions). For my present purpose, these names stand out: (1) HUME (d.1776), who in his AN ENQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING (1777, now Open Court reprint), 224, says "Necessity is something that exists in the mind, not in objects": we humans are limited to dealing with the real-in-system (paradigm), for the really real is unavailable to our mind. This was highly fruitful as epistemological premise and devastating when heightened to a metaphysic (to produce solipsism and agnosticism, then, by further heightening, atheism); (2) KANT (d.1804), esp. in his RELIGION WITHIN THE LIMITS OF REASON; (3) DARWIN; (4) MARX; and (5) FREUD.

2. All of the aforementioned, in increasing order of culpability and of amnesia, unconsciously/consciously smuggled metaphysics back into their thinking and included their smugglings under the head of "science." Whereas at the beginning of the process religion, as society's watchman of traditional values and virtues, opposed the scientific method (though many of its progenitors were theologically trained and even ordained), now science-become-scientism proclaimed itself the enemy of religion (e.g., Freud's MOSES AND MONOTHEISM and THE FUTURE OF AN ILLUSION). Turn-about was not fair play, and it has proved disastrously impoverishing to mind and society. Personal note: More than ½ c. ago I was trained in scientism (still today the religion of our public schools), then was converted to antiscientism in the form of American Protestant fundamentalism (about the time Khomeini was converted to Islamic fundamentalism: how easy it is for me to read his mind!), then was converted to "the truth" (i.e., how I now put it all together, with quote-marks to indicate my struggle against overclaiming).

3. All models-paradigms-systems-philosophies sooner or later humiliate their maintainers, and the compost-pile of humiliations is adding up to (1) more knowledge, (2) some wisdom, and (3) the modesty of authentic intellectual maturity. Internal/external intellectual police are cutting way down on metaphysical smuggling: bracketings-out are less frequently sliding, by amnesia, into throwings-out. Analogy: One is a poor chessplayer who can't (1) remember all the moves he's made and (2) retain instant in mind all the reasons he made each move. Thinkers today are, in this sense at least, becoming better chessplayers. E.g., Herbert Simon (MODELS OF MAN, Wiley/57, 11): "Causal orderings are simply properties of the scientist's model." In my current parlance, God has freed us to be connection-makers ("mind" in contrast to brain: Bucky Fuller's INTUITION, Anchor/73).