

LOVE, HATE, AND FLAB: AEROBICS FOR THE SOUL ----- ELLIOTT #1799

5. Jesus' generalized benevolence ("Love your enemies," L.6.27, M.5.44) is on the divine model (sun, rain). God (as does Jesus) "hates" (i.e., rejects: hate as intention and action more than as feeling) persistent evil-lovers.

In our 1984 America, flab has become an incarnation of the devil. It's immoral to have flab. What's even worse (in most folks' eyes), it's shameful. No wonder cosmeticians and couturiers make billions ingeniously designing flab-concealment. There's no such things as an immoral society: different societies (and the same society at different times) are moral about different things. As a sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible grace, conscience visibilizes values, which (since Gn. 3) have yes/no//right/wrong switches--e.g., in one's own write-your-own-ten-commandments Decalog, "adultery" is replaceable by "flab," and by many has been....When flab is the devil, one's particular diet-exercise program is (for the moment) God. The last line of the L.P. (minus its doxology) becomes "And deliver us from flab." ...Now (I'm sneaking up through my metaphor to the point of this thinksheet), what flab is to the body, indifference is to the soul. As underneath sacrament is grace and underneath conscience is value, underneath a-pathy (Greek, "un-feeling") is indifference, uncaring, normlessness (anomie), listlessness (accidie), the diametrical of soul-energy, which is underneath love/hate.

1. Because we are so artsy-craftsy, Cape Cod has a number of small smithies (the shops, i.e.: blacksmiths themselves are seldom small, but muscle-rejoicers). When a few days ago I was looking at one and meditating (as Jeremiah in a pottery), it occurred to me that whatever his projects, the smithy's first task is to start his blast-fire: on an unhot hearth he can shape nothing. (In my metaphor-mixing, also he can shape nothing with flab: muscle + fire + intention = humanly useful metal.)
2. Remember e.e. cummings: "Be of love a little more careful than anything." The burden of this thinksheet is in the substituting of "love/hate" for "love" in this quotation: if we are to glorify God in helping the human soul grow and abound with peace and joy, we shall have to manage the hate-expression of soul-energy as wisely as the love-expression of soul-energy.
3. In beginning this management, we immediately confront language-trouble in the NT, especially in Paul and John, both of whom use the Hellenistic-personification genre in praise of love. John's "God is love" easily, blasphemously, as in Ashley Montague's debate with me, becomes, falaciously, a reversible proposition: "Love is God." Besides reducing religion to morals, this reading perverts morals by right/wrong moralizing of (respectively) love/hate--whereby good little girls and boys are taught to be dishonest to both love and hate but especially to hate as either hot-driven (=anger) or cold-driven (=malice). Now hear Paul's Hellenistic hymn to love: Love doesn't get irritated, forgets wrongs, (NIV) "always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." NB: Paul is praising a *virtue*, not talking about a *human being*. Unfortunately, translators tend to confuse the two; e.g., NIV says love is "not easily angered": the adverb is sheer, and bad, paraphrase: the Greek says plainly love doesn't get mad, irritated (the stem from which we get "paroxysm"). By false inference, mad is bad; so of course hate is bad (hate being ripened anger). Again, was Paul himself cool (never irritated)? Did he forget wrongs? Was he gullible ("always trusts")? Pollyanna optimistic ("always hopes")? Too inflexible to quit when the quitting's good ("always perseveres")?
4. Exercise, isotonic-aerobic: For the soul, LOVE is pull-inhale, HATE is push-exhale. Mindbody, bodymind: visible/invisible muscle, strength. Only indifference is flab-making, and love and hate are equidistant from indifference. "Hate the sin, love the sinner"? But the sin is no more disembodied from the sinner than faith is from works.
4. Existentially and eschatologically, love and hate are equidistant from shalom. More than is the Hellenistic, the Hebraic strand is more honest-to-feelings, not condemning negative feelings out of hand either in humanity or in deity. Unfortunately for Christianity and the West, the Greek ideal of *apatheia* (passionlessness) has gotten built into the ideal of sanctity: saints are cool, both as and because God is cool. Ergo, double denial: God as "good" means no negative emotions, and we are "bad" when we do have negative emotions. The advance of psychology and psychotherapy is helping us recover the Hebraic heritage of emotional freedom/honesty.