

*Hold still!* says the dentist about to work on your teeth. He may or may not be personable, but he's dealing with impersonal material (your teeth) impersonally (his neurophysical skills, there being a currently best way to deal with each of your dental problems). That's the science-technology side of what he's doing; the art side adds the personal (you two), and the religion side adds the Ur-personal (literally, the "Source-personal," God) if either or both of you are theists, and the philosophy side remarks the personal/impersonal interplay in all the relations and contexts of the situation....This thinksheet is about the fact and consequences of the dessication of the personal in *homo modernus-postmodernus*. Because it marvelously displays the ambiguity here, I'm using Bernard Malamud's THE FIXER (Dell/66/68) as baseline.

1. My Buddhist students at U. of Hawaii claimed it's easier to be nontheists, and I replied "And it was easier for Adam and Eve to eat the apple." They argued for *advaita* (nonduality, the Hindic ontology that eliminates the personal by eliminating the interpersonal), and I argued for *dvaita* (the Creator/creature, person-person duality) *advaita* being its philosophical denial and betrayal being its moral denial. In the "relaxed" American Zeitgeist, these two denials converge, with (respectively) loneliness and non/anti-commitment resulting. Jimmy Carter called us to confess this "malaise," but we (not I!) voted instead to "stand tall" (which, unfortunately, correlates with behaving small).

2. My said Buddhist students and I agreed to love each other and work together as teacher/students while accusing each other of being under the thrall of *maya* (illusion). I (they said) am under the illusion that in the Garden of Eden, the population was more extensive than Adam, Eve, the snake and other animals, and the plants: they (I said) are under the illusion that there is no God (Ur-personal).... To give NO OFFENSE (subtitle CIVIL RELIGION AND PROTESTANT TASTE, J.M. Cuddihy (Seabury/78)), many sophisticated Am. Christians never accuse nontheists of being captive to illusion--rather, they speak of (1) "pluralism" and (2) agnosticism (viz., the unavailability, to the human mind, of the being of Being Itself--NB: ITself, the Ultimate Impersonal!). To the extent that sophistication removes me from them, I cannot agree with the naive believers; but neither can I with those sophisticated Am. Christians who never accuse nontheists of being captive to illusion. Rather, I accuse, but within the limits of (1) our pluralistic situation and (2) biblical agnosticism (Is.55.8f) and (3) my experience of "the world" as BOTH personal AND impersonal. And I'm allergic to the neonaive, who glibly speak of what their God-Buddy will do in healing, defending, causing to prosper, etc.--and who accuse me of some or other form of deism.

3. Both the personal and the impersonal Weltbild correlate with both life and death. Malamud's Jewish jack-of-all-trades (thus, "the fixer") is impersonal-biophilous: he's atheist and pro-life personal: he undergoes awesome suffering because of his refusal to betray truth and his people. Malamud's brilliant irony has the "Christians" (Russians in power between the two revolutions, viz., 1905 and 1917) personal (God-believers) and necrophilous (pro-death, betraying truth and everybody in sight in order to get this one Jew killed). The novel is no tour de force: we all know that though the God-view SHOULD correlate with life, truth, honor (anti-betrayal), it sometimes DOES correlate with death. As an Enlightenmentnik, Malamud puts reason on the atheist-honorable side; contrarily, I hold that reason correlates more with theism--and agree with him that reason correlates with honor (the honoring of truth, covenant, and those who stand against all betrayals).

4. Yakov Bok (Malamud's protagonist) is almost, to use a Tournier phrase, "a whole person in the broken world." At least he's a true person in a world impersonal because (1) it treats persons by categories of prejudice rather than as individuals and (2) its bureaucratic structures are faceless, inhuman, contra-personal. That picture I shall call the single impersonal. Not at all strange that Malamud

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is, as is his hero, Jewish, a messianic figure, YHWH's servant even though atheist (though really pantheist: he's always reading Spinoza, who's the chief support for Bok's humanity--e.g., p.271: "What is it S. says? If the state acts in ways that are abhorrent to human nature it's the lesser evil to destroy it. Death to the anti-Semites! Long live revolution! Long live liberty!"). It occurs to me that Malamud is Kafka redivivus: K.'s "K" in THE CASTLE and THE TRIAL, and his Karl Rossmann in AMERIKA, are grandfathers, as it were, of Bok: one lone Jew against the impersonal goy system. Ambiguity here: all these protagonists are more antiheroic than heroic, and all are somewhat salvific while their situations are saviorless. In contrast, Western optimism presents us with simple (and usually simple-minded, or at least single-minded) saviors--e.g., "The Lone Ranger"; Indiana Jones (in Spielberg's recent films, esp. "I.J. and the Temple of Doom"); the gauleiter-like captain in the just released (Nov/84) \$42-million DUNE, which unwittingly warns us to be wary of saviors, who may (as did the Rev. James Jones of People's Temple) flip from divine to demonic--so the witty bromide, The Lord save us from saviors!

5. *Homo modernus* fights for his/her autonomy against (1) theonomy (God's will supervening over, and qualifying, "the individual") and (2) bureaucracy in particular, institutional trammels in general. *Homo postmodernus* throws in the towel on (2) but considers her/him-self victorious over (1), and (in various narcissisms) is peevish about both heteronomies. Neither of these *homos* can be free of the theistic factor: both are shaped by the divine Patriarch, the biblical God, from whom both have their powers, including slay-the-father independence (back to Eden). In Malamud, as in Kafka, I find blocking on this: both are under the illusion that their notion of "the individual" (for which both are indebted to Kierkegaard) exists in isolation from the theistic heritage. This illusion now needs to be named, against the secularistic claim that God is dead. If in Kafka and Malamud God were really dead, so would be their protagonists: Kierkegaard thoroughly, profoundly, understood this--and K. and M. did not pick this up from him because (1) as Jews, they were disinclined to S.K.'s Christianity and (2) as secularists, they were antagonistic to the biblical God.

6. K. in THE CASTLE and THE TRIAL is a lost soul, Rossmann in AMERIKA is (unique in Kafka's oeuvre) a soul in process of salvation, and Bok is a soul consumed by Jobean determination to maintain his integrity against all comers. Day by day we all meet all three of these souls, + many souls under the illusion that they are saved, + a few saved souls: daily we meet five psychotypes. Overlay this grid on the sixteen Jungian personality types, and what have you got? Something additional to Fowler's faith-types.

7. But it's time we got to the thinksheet's title: The most frightening aspect of Am. society today is that most Americans of whatever religious/nonreligious persuasion are fragmentary souls, frightened of life as they must confront it soma-wise and media-wise day by day. They are under "the dominion of the double impersonal": daily they battle the impersonal "world" of "science" (the atheist version in the media) and bureaucracy, daily they strive against severe odds (e.g., the forces inimical to family life) to maintain and enhance the personal in their and others' lives. (A.J. Muste, when asked why he organized and participated in hopeless demonstrations: "Maybe I can't save the world, but I can prevent the world from converting me.")

8. Carl Sagan and other media scientists, while properly conveying awe before natural forces, strengthen by their atheism the forces against the person. Einstein, a person shaped by our spiritual heritage, undercut that heritage by permitting himself to fall under the illusion that the universe is impersonal (and of course also by promoting the development of nukes, man's greatest power to rub out persons): "I cannot conceive of a God who rewards and punishes creatures, or has a will of the kind we experience in ourselves." Flat contradiction to Jesus' "Thy will be done." Let's not leave it to the fundamentalists to point out the flatness of the contradiction!

9. To display the factors in this thinksheet, make a grid with "personal" and "impersonal" in the y axis, "good" and "evil" in the left x axis, and "autonomy" and "heteronomy" in the right x axis. This matrix is useful all the way from the inner life to politics, whose essence is the clash of order and freedom.