

THINKING , TYPES OF ----- ELLIOTT #1924

There are ways of being (ontological modes), ways of knowing (epistemological modes, as in Montagu's title), ways of being religious (axiological modes, as in Streng's title), "ways of light and darkness" (parenetic mode, as in the ancient Jewish title), ways of perceiving, ways of testing (scientific models and paradigms), ways of loving (3?4?5?6?), and who knows how many other "ways" (= journey-options, travel-choices)? This thinksheet is about ways or types or kinds of THINKING, on the simple pattern of three prepositions. This simplicity is to serve pragma more than it is to serve philosophy: my purpose is practical, viz., to help folks perceive, at any moment, the particular mode or mood and method of their awareness and intending. Sharpening this perception (1) delivers one from the hubris of imagining that, at a particular moment, one is doing total thinking, (2) helps one to peripheral awareness of the ways one is leaving out, (3) frees one to mature one's skills at the particular way one is using, and (4) opens one to listen to others who, at that moment, aren't in one's thinking-mode. WARNING: Prepositions are both syntactically and semantically the most volatile part of speech, so don't get hung up on differences between your/my use, here, of "on," "of," and "about."

THINKING ON

This is the close, near, subjective, warm, quiet mode--as in the hymn, "Lord Jesus, think on me." Here we are at home, loved, nurtured, out of danger, our faith-trust-hope intact and unembattled. This is religion's "eternal life," "Elysian fields," even "Cocaigne." This thinking is adumbrative, exfoliative, reflective, "Il Penseroso." So folks even confuse this with "being religious," whereas it's only one essential element of religion. Note "essential": if one knows nothing of this devotional-doxological mode, one is not religious. And if one neglects this mode (call it "praying without ceasing," or whatever), one soon gives off signals of spiritual malnutrition. Neglecting this type of thinking distorts the other types and warps private and public life. Much of what now passes for "religion" is neurotic vis-a-vis this mode: hypertrophied in overclaiming for it (as in "spaced out" narcissistic mysticisms, East and West) or hypotrophied in giving it too little attention (as in gung-ho actionism, which errs in imaging human nature individual/corporate, and thus human history, more malleable than forever proves to be the case).... Means to this mode are meditation, guided fantasy, contemplation of images (as "the Presence of God," which in another mode is other than an image). Bonhoeffer says it: "Whoever I am, Lord, you know I am yours": here identity is not a search but a gift for which one is perpetually-consciously grateful. To distribute the women of the Bible, it is Sarah-Rebecca-Rachel-Esther-Mary.

THINKING OF

This is mid-distance, warm-cool, the analytic present but under the control of the appreciative, Ruth instead of Naomi, Pricilla. (My Biblical women here are my choice for my purpose: other choices for another purpose are in Jas.G.Williams' WOMEN RECOUNTED: NARRATIVE THINKING AND THE GOD OF ISRAEL (Sheffield: Almond/82).) We might call this mode "appropriate remembering," i. e., the past serving present and future (in a tense phrase, "remembering the future"). Or "critical caring," honoring the heritage in order to serve its caring heart. It's almost everybody's most common way of thinking: humans are conservative-progressive. Preachers and politicians please note.

THINKING ABOUT

This is arms-length or farther, cool, critical, objective but not value-free (a mode that cannot exist for humans), "scientific," testing. The primordial woman Eve risked chaos and got it, together with the potential for a higher cosmos than Eden. How about Ruth and Mary of Magdala as two more Biblical women of this thinking-type? (And, on the down side, Delilah, Potiphar's wife, the temptress in Proverbs.) This analytic thinking is as "religious" as the other modes, but religious leaders are least developed in this mode.