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Trends. Troubles: The Northern Ireland Settlement

Editor

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Analysis of the recent "landmark settlement" on Northern Ireland forged by various factions of Catholics and Protestants from Northern Ireland, the national leaderships of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, and at least two United States interlocutors (mainly, George Mitchell, occasionally, President Bill Clinton) can take two different stances: the same two stances that seem to have characterized the human condition throughout history.

The more common is the Apollonian: a rational, logical, systematic, formal treatment of text with the ultimate goal of harmony. This stance explicates, parses, and interprets features of the settlement's Northern Ireland Assembly, North-South Ministerial Council, Council of the Isles, removal of the Republic of Ireland's territorial claim on Northern Ireland, and general modification of political infrastructure. It also features formal models of fairness--equality and equity--and justice--substantive and procedural--as applied to the settlement's text. Troubles in reaching consensus and reducing conflict through the Apollonian stance include degrees of incompatibility of different belief systems, modes of logic, semantic attributions, and other varieties of social cognition.

The less common stance is the Dionysian: an Apollonian subverted with emotion, impression, instinct, and subconscious dynamics. This stance often underlies the Apollonian and may often be more powerful concerning cooperation and/or conflict. Examples include continuing to fight because (1) one knows only one life and does not care to know another; (2) aggression has taken an ascendant role within the psyche; (3) material and social status will be lost if peace holds; (4) the need for vengeance from proximal and distal inequities of the present and past does not abate; and (5) there is acting out of intrapsychic conflict so common in the political environment. The Dionysian subsumes a powerful subtext less analyzed, less amenable to analysis and modification, but more likely to threaten and destroy even a majority's hopes for peace.