

02 Basic Politics

This chapter gives my political standards. I use them to assess stances and religions later in the book. Here the task is only to give my values. My values are not surprising. They follow typical mainstream America, not too left or right, not much different from a school “civics” class. The term “state” means one big political unit, usually one country, such as France or Thailand, not only one state within the United States, unless I say “the state of Alabama”.

Introduction.

The values, behaviors, and institutions that support modern democracy, modern democracy itself, arose from only one people with one culture and religion: Christianity in Northwest Europe, mostly England. Modern democracy did not originally come from anywhere else although some roots can be traced back to Greece and Israel.

Even though modern democracy originated only in Christian Northwest Europe, now nearly all countries try to be democratic. Most peoples of the world learn democratic ideals. People from nearly all cultures and religions adapt ideas and institutions from Christian Northwest Europe for their religion and culture. Not all peoples succeed well at local democracy but the task is doable. What once were particular values are now global general values.

Modern democracy originated in one particular place, culture, and religion; and countries adapt it to their specific history and situation. Yet democracies must not favor or disfavor any particular religion, culture, or ethnicity. Democracies must try to be neutral, general, or “secular”. Democracies especially have to seek neutrality and generality when they have many ethnic and religious groups in them, when they are “plural”. Nearly all countries now are plural. Neutrality-generality is hard but it is doable too if we accept history and we don’t obsess.

All government has to feel at least somewhat sacred to its people. The government has to be linked to something more important than pie and taxes. Good government has to help give purpose to life. Most people like to feel that the state is sanctioned by a particular religion and the key religious figure(s) of the religion. This is how democracy started in Christianity in Europe. Even atheists feel government is about something really important, more important than they are as individuals. Yet modern democracies cannot connect closely to any particular religion or deity. They are not the agent of any deity such as the Judeo-Christian-Muslim God or of any “force” such as Dharma or the Tao. This situation is a small contradiction but we can live with it, again if we accept history and don’t obsess. This dilemma can enliven democracy when it energizes interaction among groups.

“General democracy” requires general morality, general order, and general welfare. General morality, order, and welfare are the key core institutions that a modern democratic state needs to run well.

Modern democracies must support ONLY general morality, order, and welfare. They cannot support the morality of any particular group, not the morality of the people that began modern democracy (European Christians), the morality of the dominant ethnic-religious group (Japanese Buddhists), or the morality of loud powerful subgroups. Democracies should enjoy their own history and culture but they also must go beyond that when it undercuts general morality, order, and welfare. General morality, order, and welfare must be neutral to all religion, ideology, gender, age, and socio-economic class. Democracies cannot let the morality of any particular group control the general morality, order, and welfare.

Modern states need adept citizens and they need people who are good neighbors, the kind of people that hold the right values and can run the state described above. These people are mostly what this chapter is all about. I describe them here, chiefly through lists of values and traits. I do not describe how modern states cultivate these values or this kind of person.

Democracy is failing in America and the world. The failure is not spectacular. It is a slow slide. Failure is caused by: (1) not facing up to issues of self-government, capitalism, world economy, and ecology; (2) the modern world is too hard for mass populist democracy; (3) uncritical mass populism with its tendency to seize on bad leaders and bad ideas; (4) the modern world is too hard for wealthy powerful people to guide the state; (5) individuals, families, ethnic groups, and businesses depend on the state for success and security; (6) individuals etc. compete too much for access to the state as patron; and (6) individuals etc. now prefer wealth, security, and power to adept citizenship. Citizens will not, and too often cannot, face deep issues of human nature, self-government, citizenship, capitalism, world economy, and ecology. I mention some issues in this chapter, some in other chapters, and discuss them more in essays apart from this book.

This chapter is not a treatise on the state or self-government. This chapter is not a lament or a plan to save America. This chapter simply lists values and traits. It does not tell their history.

Modern democracy began among one people with one culture and religion, and then spread around the world to other peoples with different cultures and religions. Government has to feel sacred but modern democracies must try to be general and secular. Nearly all states, including America, were begun by one dominant ethnic group with one religion and culture, yet now democracies should not favor any group. Ideas of general morality, general order, and general welfare came out of particular ideas of morality, order, and welfare in specific ethnic and religious groups. People always live in specific groups, and take particular values and character from specific groups, so it is hard to think in terms of general morality, order and welfare; yet this is what adept citizens must do. All this is a more interesting story than I can tell here. Please see my essays apart from this book.

Ethnicity, Values, and Behaviors.

Americans like to stress individuals rather than groups but groups matter in real life and self-governing. It was only through group life and the history of a particular group that we got the values and institutions of democracy. I don't decide here whether people or groups matter more; I only say groups matter enough. Culture, values, institutions, attitudes, and character come from groups. I use "values" in the usual sense, to refer to what groups do to members, and to refer to cultures, institutions etc.

Groups shape individual behavior. Groups give the values that make people who are good citizens and good people. Groups give the values that make people who are not adept citizens even if they are good people in other ways, such as people who do not vote but do help the needy. Groups give the values that make bad people too, people with bad attitudes.

Not all countries, ethnic groups, and religions hold the values needed for successful self-government. Not all groups in America hold the values, not even groups that have been here a long time. We need to encourage groups that teach correct values and we need to disparage groups that teach bad values.

Any religious group and ethnic group now can take up the values needed for good self-government and make them its own. No religious or ethnic group needs to become the shadow of European Christians, either real or idealized European Christians.

Taking up the values is a matter of leadership in groups and of the general will in groups. Other groups can help, and should, but ultimately the group itself must make the jump. This need to make the jump yourself applies to groups who already live in tolerable situations. This view does not cover people living in tyranny, who cannot overthrow tyranny without help, and who cannot build good self-government without outside help. This view does not cover "nation building".

In taking up the values, religious groups and ethnic groups do have to change, and they must accept this change. There is no other way. There is no other way to get good self-government and to participate in the modern world economy. If you do not change, you will not self-govern and will not earn the benefits of a modern economy. Your values, institutions, culture, behaviors, attitudes, typical personality of people in your group, and even your art, might all have to change. You still don't have to become stereotypical White Christians but you do have to change.

Your group and all the individuals in it have to decide if participating in good self-government and in economic progress is worth change. If you decide it is not, if you will not change, then you have to accept living apart from the mainstream, without full self-government and economic benefit. You have to accept that other people will govern you. You likely have to accept living marginally, often near the bottom of the economic hierarchy. All this is on you.

In theory, all religious and ethnic groups can learn the proper values but, in fact, not all groups do learn the proper values quickly and fully. Some groups have difficulty taking the values to heart, even groups that have been in America a long time. Some will not change or cannot change. These groups have trouble with crime, thugs, bad leaders, silly ideologies, and bad attitudes, and they do not achieve much political and economic success. While their failure might be due in part to prejudice by other groups, the failure is due in large part to them as individuals and as a group.

After repeatedly failing to explain briefly relations between ethnicity, religion, and modern democracy, I decided to move that topic to separate essays outside this book. You can get a good idea from what I write here about values and citizenship.

PART 1: The Real American Dream.

When most people say “The American Dream” they have in mind material success, financial security, a happy family, and doing better than the neighbors. Details vary from a “Mc-Mansion” in the suburbs to a big apartment in the city but the dream is the same. This dream is basically materialism-with-family; it is perfectly human; and is fine as far as it goes. In the Cold War with communism, the American federal government used this materialistic dream to tout American superiority. When politicians say “America is the best country in history”, they have this dream in mind. People from around the world come to America looking mostly for this dream. Ronald Reagan uncritically pushed this dream as the master dream, from which all else flowed. When minorities, such as Blacks, call for their share of the American Dream, this is what they want. When majorities, such as middle class Whites, act to protect the share that they already have, this is what they protect.

I have nothing against material success but this is the wrong ideal for America. Affluence is not what makes America great. If we hold this ideal, we undercut what America was really all about, what America still should be all about, but is less all about every year. We also undercut the affluence that people seek.

America should be all about political freedom, self-government, and the adept citizenship that is integral to political freedom and self-government. America should be all about the responsibility of citizenship. It should be all about groups fostering adept citizenship among their members. America should be all about successful self-government. America should be all about having the right institutions and right people so people can think freely, speak freely, act responsibly, make up their own minds, help in self-government, make a living, live mostly as they wish, let others live, and make a good difference in the lives of selves, neighbors, and children. This vision requires people who combine realism and idealism. It takes people who have the traits that I explain below.

Political freedom, political rights, and political responsibility are the same thing. Every freedom and every right entails responsibility, and responsibility is the biggest part. Any nation that seeks political freedom must have citizens who know rights but feel responsibility more than rights. I use “freedom” as shorthand to refer to all three. Never forget that freedom means responsibility more than rights.

We can have political freedom and still have some differences in wealth and power. Modest differences in wealth and power make life more interesting. It is not clear how much disparity in wealth and power we can endure and still have political freedom.

We can't have political freedom if many people suffer materialistic hardship or if a big gap in wealth and power divides masses from owners. We can't have freedom with a few “haves”, many “have-nots”, and nobody in the middle. We need a base level of material security for nearly all people and we need a big enough middle class. The large majority of people in America already have enough for material security. The middle class is in trouble now but there are still enough middle class people in America. So, while wealth matters, we are still wealthy enough so that lack of wealth, and wealth differences, do not block political freedom if we choose to pursue political freedom as a high goal.

Although some material wealth and security are necessary as a base for freedom, material security and material equity are not political freedom and do not guarantee political freedom. Soon most Chinese will

be materially comfortable but I doubt they will have political freedom. We need the right values, attitudes, ideas, and institutions besides material security and moderate wealth equity. Prosperity is more likely to arise where people are free, and prosperity can reinforce political freedom, but wealth does not guarantee political freedom. So we have to keep the two distinct; and we have to hold political freedom first.

Political freedom does tend to produce prosperity but that is not why we should pursue it. We cannot pursue political freedom so as to gain wealth and power. Political freedom is not a means to an end unless the end is religious – and that is not my concern now. Political responsibility and freedom are not mere tools. We have to pursue political freedom for its own sake regardless of wealth and power.

If you wish mostly prosperity and don't care much about political freedom, if you pursue political freedom primarily as a means to prosperity and not for itself, then know that fascism usually delivers prosperity more efficiently, and gives more prosperity, than democracy. The Emperor brings peace, security, and prosperity to the galaxy. If you care about wealth and security more than freedom, then you should move to countries that have significant prosperity but not full political freedom, such as Russia and China. In practice, they are fascist now, not communist. Many Americans really prefer fascist order-and-prosperity to political freedom but don't know that is what they really prefer. Ethnic and religious groups that seek the constant care of the state, using ideas of "rights" and "tradition", really prefer the order-and-prosperity of fascism but don't know that is what they really prefer.

Americans have to take the chance that political freedom will not gain us wealth and power. Now, most Americans will not take this chance. Not even strident left and right wingers really will take this chance.

When people pursue wealth first, they always overlook the political vision. They wrongly think wealth is freedom. They do not do their job as citizens, and they "screw up" the country. That is the true legacy of both Reagan on the right and of "my imaginary giant share of the imaginary giant pie" on the left.

We do not have to give up material wealth and security to get political freedom. One does not always exclude the other. With luck, we can have both. Freedom supports prosperity. America has been lucky to get both. But we have to get priorities straight. If we must choose between them, choose freedom. We have to put political freedom and responsibility first. We have not done this lately.

Americans, on the whole, now in 2016, live well materially but they also live in jealousy and fear and they do not live as good citizens. Jealousy and fear are both symptoms and causes of not holding political freedom first and of not doing our job as citizens. By not holding political freedom first, we lose material success and justice too, so we feel jealousy and fear more. Then we overlook responsibility more; then neglecting our duties as citizens leads to more jealousy and fear; and so on.

I can't guess accurately what ratio of the people has to hold the political vision first so America as a whole stays free. I think we need much more than half yet I am sure less than half of Americans now see the political vision, hold it higher than the material dream, and do the work needed to make freedom real.

The baseline of wealth and security that is needed for political freedom does not include a guarantee to live well and to be able to raise your children well; and especially it is not a guarantee from the state. The baseline of needed wealth is not a guarantee of a job; it does not assure a well-paying job with benefits.

It does not guarantee that not-smart, uneducated, lazy, or conniving people live well. It does not mean all members of a family live well. You must accept personal responsibility when you start a family, including educating your children. You cannot expect the state to be co-parent.

The baseline is high enough to include helping some people who cannot help themselves and who will not abuse the help. Likely, the baseline mean that homeless well-intended people without children can be fed, housed, and get medical care.

The baseline of wealth and security does not include a guarantee that your business will do well, whether big or small. There should be no “too big to fail”. The baseline does not mean you can keep your fortune and position no matter what happens in the world economy.

It is easy to blame poor citizenship on laziness, greed, and partisan politics, and such blame is partly true, but those are not the biggest reasons now. Since the early 1900s, the world has gotten so complex that the average person can't understand it well enough to be a good citizen. Not even experienced business “people of the world” really understand it well enough now. We can't understand it well enough to choose people who might understand it, and who could lead us well.

When we can't “get it”, we give up trying. Populist democracy fails. Instead of seeking freedom first, we chase wealth, chase security, play partisan politics, play group politics, seek the state as a patron, make sure we “get ours first”, and hope political freedom miraculously follows. We choose leaders who might be smart but are not the right leaders for our situation now. They promise security, prosperity, and “our rights” in short order but cannot deliver; and then excuse their failure by demonizing the other side. Our leaders make sure most of us can chase the material dream well enough so we stay under control. They give us a taste of security and advancement by offering the state as patron. They bribe us, and we take it happily. If they won't bribe us, we vote them out of office. We will not deal with how the average person fits into the modern world, and we pay the price for willful blindness.

Evidence that we can't figure out the situation: (1) no major political party has offered a cogent vision for America since about 1970. Not “more stuff”, “bigger pie”, “rising tide”, “absolute equality”, “my rights”, “my share of the pie”, “bleed the rich”, or “starve the beast” is a cogent vision. (2) Race relations in America are good but not good enough. Yet no group has offered a realistic vision of how to make race relations good enough. We will not dig in to face the issue squarely. To face the issue of race means not only to face White prejudice but more so to face the flaws in capitalism and the fact that Black culture, society, and racism are big factors in Black problems. (3) People now talk of rights without understanding rights and they are far from feeling the responsibilities that come with rights. People “demand my rights” to get power, privilege, preference, a patron in the state, and revenge against other groups. They use the word “rights” as a magic word of control to intimidate and silence others. People see “rights” only as a crude tool. (4) America cannot control spending, so we have national debt of the kind that caused the collapse of France after Louis the Fourteenth and the collapse of many lesser countries.

America is not losing its feel for basic political values mostly due to immigrants. Long-term Americans, including White Christians, are losing their feel for basic values. Some immigrants come to America for political freedom but most immigrants come seeking the material dream. Before, that was alright because their children quickly learned the political vision. Immigrants came in numbers that could be assimilated

to political ideas, and there were enough Americans who knew political values to teach immigrants. Now, we have too few citizens who know real citizenship. Too many of the Americans who once knew, revered, and taught the political vision have lost it. Too many immigrants come too fast for the Americans who do know the political vision. I don't blame immigrants. They buy what we sell. We need to think how to teach the political vision to the people who are already here and to new people so we all get the political vision deeply enough. To teach them, we ourselves must first know the political vision as it applies in the modern world. But we don't and we won't learn.

Even Americans who have been here a long time and-or were born here have lost their feel for basic political values because the world is harder now and it is not clear how to live by the old values. How do we balance individual freedom versus terrorists and hackers? Why don't unemployed people and poor people just go away? Why don't ethnic minorities just get good jobs? Why do Whites and Asians do so much better in school? If America loses its edge to the Chinese, what then? Why are medical costs so high and eat up so much of our income? Why are incomes stagnant despite the increases in productivity every year? Why are so many schools so bad? Why do we have to spend so much to get a house in a decent school district? Why can't we stop using race and start basing our decisions only on individual merit? Why can't college graduates get good jobs? What does it take to guarantee getting a good job? Why have politics been so crazy for forty years? Why can't Jews and Arabs stop fussing? Why can't we just settle some issues once and for all?

Partly the loss is due to conflict between groups, wanting to use the state for security, and competing with other groups for access to the state especially for security. Groups have grown used to the state making sure they hold an edge in education, welfare, medical benefits, programs, tax breaks, corporate welfare, and influence. Groups feel they need this edge to get along and to compete with other groups. Groups would rather let go of the values that are needed for good citizenship and self-government than to give up their ties to the state, their competitive edge, and security.

"Groups" includes religions, races, socio-economic classes, age groups, genders, occupations, business firms, etc. Middle class people do compete with poor people, Blacks do compete with Hispanics, and rich business people in America ask for help from business people in China.

It is too much to demand of any particular ethnic, religious, or gender group that it must teach deep political freedom to its members as part of its core values. But it is not too much to ask that it teach freedom, responsibility, and citizenship as a plausible extension of core values. That is what Christianity in Europe did, and that is how we got democracy. After you know God, Dharma, Jesus, Krishna, the Buddha, feminism, Black-ism, White-ism, "La Raza", or "the state must be small", extend your ideas to support good citizenship and democracy in our world now. At the least, we can expect that no group teach bad values. We cannot demand that groups teach good citizenship as their core message but we may look at what they do teach and assess that. We can hold them to standards of freedom and good citizenship. We can praise them if they make good citizens and contribute to freedom, and can blame them if they make bad citizens. If your group teaches bad ideas of freedom or citizenship, if your group enables bad attitudes, then we can, should, and will, blame it generally and blame you personally.

Luckily, every major religion can assimilate ideas of political freedom and good citizenship, and all major religions can help the whole each in its way. We don't have to blame any major religion. We can praise them all when they promote right values. They just have to do it.

You have to make up your own mind about socio-economic classes, genders, cultural movements, and artistic movements.

Ethnic groups are a difficult case. In theory, ethnicity is neutral to the values needed for self-government and economic development. Every ethnic group should be able to rapidly and fully learn the values, and the members of the ethnic group who learn the values should be able to teach them to fellows. In fact, this is not true. Ethnic groups differ quite a bit in how much their native values support good citizenship, self-government, and economic development. They differ in how readily they learn the values, what ratio of members learns the values, and how readily members who learn values teach them deeply to fellows. Some groups seem never to learn the values well enough to self-govern and succeed at capitalism, even groups that have been in the United States for a long time.

PART 2: Values about People and States.

Where Values Come from and How to Judge Them.

My standards are based on Western ideas of a good state and citizens. As I say often: My standards come from a mix of Jesus' ideas with practicality and with Northwestern European culture-and-institutions, mostly English. This source does not make ideas right or wrong; does not make every White Christian an adept citizen; does not make every non-White non-Christian non-Westerner a bad citizen; and does not automatically disqualify non-Whites, non-Westerners, and non-Christians. Just because ideas came from Jews, Christians, Europeans, and men, does not mean the ideas are right or wrong, other people did not also have them, and other people cannot make the ideas theirs. Assess ideas by their truth and use, not their origin.

We can have absolutely correct ideas in math and sometimes in science but most ideas about people have to be put in the context of other ideas; put in the context of history, society and culture; taken with a grain of caution; and taken about at middle strength. Even ideas that we hold dear, such as "fairness" and "democracy", have to be used moderately, and can be abused.

Originally "dogma" meant just "belief", "warranted belief", "likely correct belief", or "standard belief". Now a "dogma" is an idea that is held uncritically and too strongly, and often abused. We get in trouble when we push dogma or uncritically accept dogma. "Dogmatists" push dogma, usually for advantage. Turning good ideas into dogma is one of the biggest ways that states get in trouble. Too much equality is as bad as too little. Too much "defense spending" is as bad as too much welfare. This abuse is equally true of left and right. "Ideology" used to mean the ideas typical of a group or stance. Now, the term implies that the ideas do not reflect an honest assessment of truth but are complex confusing alluring tools to push an agenda held for other reasons. I use "dogma" and "ideology" similarly. The problem of abusing dogma is so common and so harmful that I allude to it often in this book.

Jingoists and ideologues have trouble living by the good values of self-government even when they push the ideas in public. That is my problem with “political correctness”, left and right: it says good things but its proponents act badly; they use the values of PC as tools. In distorting a few values to serve self and group, jingoists and ideologues effectively betray all the values.

General Morality, General Order, and General Welfare Again.

Modern democratic states developed out of the values and institutions of a specific ethnic and religious group, Christians of Western Europe, in particular from England and its daughter the United States of America. Yet modern democratic states cannot run on the basis of the values of any particular ethnic or religious group. Once having finished the foundation and walls, and climbed onto the roof, they throw down the ladder.

Modern democratic states have to develop a set of values and institutions that are as neutral as possible toward race, creed, religion, gender, age, region, socio-economic class, and other group affiliations that can hinder adept citizenship and a good state. Modern democracies need general values and general institutions. They need to support only the general morality, general order, and general welfare. All this can be done but it is hard, and it needs to be re-done often.

I do not define general morality, order, and welfare more specifically than in the points of this chapter. Please see my essays apart from this book.

Modern states must vigorously oppose any particular group that seeks to impose its values on the whole state no matter how much those values seem right to the particular group and no matter how much those values might appeal to people in general. If the values of a particular group do not coincide with general morality, general order, and general welfare, the state has no obligation to support those values and has a duty not to adopt those values. If the values of a particular group coincide with general morality, order, and welfare, the state has a duty to support those values because they do coincide with general morality, order, and welfare, and not for any other reason. In these cases, the state must make clear that it does not support the values because a particular group promotes them.

For example, anti-abortion (anti-choice), anti-gay (anti-homosexual), simplistic anti-drug, simplistic anti-gun, and simplistic pro-gun values do not serve general morality, order, or welfare no matter how right we personally might think they are. The state has a duty not to adopt these values and-or laws based on them no matter how powerful the groups that support the values. The state should resist groups that try to make these values general laws. The state should repeal existing laws that support these values.

Whenever any group seeks to make its morality dominant, it always thinks it is right and thinks it acts in the general interest. It seeks to safeguard its way of life and so it deludes itself about general morality and general welfare. It is wrong. The best safeguard for any group is general tolerance. If the morality of my group gains the upper hand now, then, in the future, the morality of another group will gain the upper hand, and then it will suppress us. It is better that no one particular group dominates. This view supports the human need for (general) morality, (general) order, and (general) welfare. This view is compatible with seeing the roots of modern democracy in Northwestern European Protestant Christianity.

This reliance only on general morality, general order, and general welfare is not Libertarianism although I admire Libertarianism. This view leaves scope for the state to maintain general institutions of “law and order” such as Federal Marshalls, FBI, military, local police, and local courts. This view allows the state to tax although this view urges the state to tax more fairly than what America does now. This view leaves scope for the state to carry out projects such as the national highway system, dams, national parks, and national health care.

The Standard Civic Values.

The following values seem self-evident but I have lived where they do not prevail, and people live badly as a result. I do not discuss extensions of these values that are common in school civics such as three branches of government. I do not discuss the military or war. I repeat sometimes for clarity. Order does not reflect importance. The values are not internally consistent, like a postulate set in mathematics. That is part of their worth and it is one reason why citizenship takes work. They are consistent enough.

-People are persons, with all that entails. I don't spell it out. We are more than rocks, trees, or animals. We have something intrinsically valuable about us. If you wish to ground our intrinsic status and value in religious ideas, you may, and I hope you do, but you need do so not as long as you accept it. Likely there are people (persons, sentient-moral-aesthetic beings) on other planets too.

-We live by rule of law. Individuals and groups should be governed by laws and not by the decisions of powerful people or cliques. Of course, some powerful people, such as judges, do some of the deciding, and some powerful people, such as legislators, make the laws.

-Individuals are the focus of rights, responsibilities, and laws. Originally in Hebrew history and Western history, this idea meant that families should not be punished for the misdeeds of individuals but it means more than that now.

-We treat individuals as adult autonomous agents who can make up their own minds about most aspects of their lives and about governing, and who are responsible.

-With few exceptions, laws apply equally to everybody regardless of wealth, power, status, age, formal education, gender, ethnicity, religion, origin, or socio-economic class. All people “count equally” under the law. People are “equal before the law”. The law does not favor any group, gender, age, ethnicity, national origin, religion, wealth, or socio-economic class. The exceptions do not diminish the power of the basic idea.

-If you wish people to follow a law, you must follow it. If you do not wish to follow a law, then you cannot expect other people to follow it. The idea of “applies equally” is the legal-political version of the Golden Rule of “act toward other people as you want them to act toward you”.

-Groups (teams, organizations, and societies) are real but they are not the focus of the law except as they are made up of individuals. We assume we can know groups in terms of individuals. This is not always true in practice, but still the individual is the focus. Individuals are responsible for their own actions even in groups. We do not collectively punish groups for what individuals do. When an individual accepts a

position and responsibility, we punish individuals for what their groups do, as when leaders give immoral commands or the head of a business firm condones illegal action by employees.

-To repeat: People are “equal before the law”.

-People are “equal before the law” but people are not equal in abilities, training, exertion, family, and luck. People also are not equal in wealth and power; see below.

-When we promote equality, we should promote equal opportunity and an equal playing field, not equal outcome – unless the outcome is bad enough to be repugnant to general morality or to threaten general order and general welfare.

-In American culture, the unit of most action really is a team rather than an individual. I discuss teams elsewhere. Although team is important, it does not have the same status as the individual in law. The idea of the team should not be confused with ideas of the family or the business corporation.

-People of sound mind and body are expected to make their own living.

-We have both rights and responsibilities. Rights always entail responsibilities and responsibilities usually entail some rights. Being a parent gives both rights and responsibilities.

-We should stress responsibilities at least as much as rights, usually more than rights.

-Democracies were founded in opposition to monarchies and oligarchies, so they stress individual rights. Even so, especially in a democracy, all rights come with responsibilities. The idea of rights has been used well in America. It was used to gain freedom, dignity, and full citizenship for groups that had been oppressed before as in movements for Civil Rights, women, and gay people. Yet, too often since about 1970, the idea of rights has been turned into a dogma and abused by people to get what they want. The abuse of entitlement programs in the United States rests on the abuse of the idea of rights. “Civil Rights” has been abused. Business firms abuse rights. So, while we should never overlook rights, we always have to recall the responsibilities that go along with rights, and stress those more than rights. People should “call out” the abuse of rights, and abusers, as much as people “call out” unfairness toward them and demand their rights.

-Americans should maintain all the rights in the Bill of Rights. They should think about the responsibilities that go with each right.

-Society depends on order. In real life, individuals cannot have any freedom without some order, and cannot have greatest freedom without a particular order that preserves greatest freedom. Order does erode some freedom, and that is the price we pay for any freedom at all and for the greatest freedom. We rely on the state for order. We rely on individual people to internalize morality and order, families to teach morality and order, churches to teach it, and friends, work mates, and work places to guide us.

-We need a balance between individual freedom versus social order. Americans have been better at finding this balance than we usually get credit for but we still have work to do.

-Individuals should be able to control themselves so as not to harm others or society.

-Groups of individuals should be able to self-govern. The largest most inclusive group of individuals, the state, should be able to self-govern by forming a democracy.

-Not all people are competent to be adept citizens of a self-governing democracy. Some people are not competent because they are intrinsically unable (not smart enough or otherwise mentally handicapped), some are not competent because they have not learned needed skills, and some because they have not learned the facts about issues facing the democracy. How many people are competent or not competent depends on the problems that the democracy faces. There is no guarantee that enough people are competent. To allow the people who are not competent to participate in self-governing hurts democracy and the nation.

-We expect the state to guard general order, welfare, and morality. We expect the state not to be overly zealous in guarding general order, welfare, and morality.

-We expect individual people and the state to work constantly to make life better. I do not define "better". "Getting better" can include better general morality, better general order, and better welfare. The state is not only the guardian of order, welfare, or morality but the agent of progress, of getting better. The idea that the state is an active agent of getting better is one way in which the Western idea of the state differed from other ideas of the state until recently.

-“Better general morality” does not necessarily mean more morality; it could mean fewer rules. “Better order” does not necessarily mean more order; it could mean fewer rules. “Better welfare” does not have to mean more wealth although “more welfare” often does. “Better welfare” does not have to mean more equal wealth holdings or income. “Better welfare” could mean better use of the wealth that we have already, or could mean better distributed wealth as long as the state does not go against other principles too much in aiding better distribution.

-People are not the owners of the planet and of nature. People are only the stewards.

-Sometimes individuals work to make things better apart from the state. Sometimes individuals working to make things better is better than the state taking the task. Some tasks can be done only by the state. Some tasks are done by the state and individuals working together.

-When the state pursues getting better, the state should not override other important values such as rule of law, human dignity, privacy, nature, political freedom, and basic private property, or override them as little as possible.

-The ability of people to be secure and to make their lives better rests in large part on private property. Private property is a basic right. The private use of property often leads to increase in general wealth and to “things getting better” in general. Without good reason, the state should not undermine the abilities to hold and dispose of property.

-Yet the right of private property is not absolute. Sometimes the use of private property harms general welfare or general order, as when people and business firms pollute or when they harm nature so much that nature cannot recover. The state may limit private property and its use. When the state limits rights in private property, takes ownership of property, or takes control of property, the state should keep in mind that it too is not always a good steward and often uses property less adeptly than private citizens.

-“Getting better” is not simply more wealth. We can get better though increased wealth but not always. Wealth usually helps but not always. Increased wealth is not the only way to get better and does not guarantee we are better. Sometimes increased wealth erodes getting better, as when we use immoral policies to increase wealth or when increased wealth blinds us to social and natural problems. We have to learn to see these issues clearly.

-The state may, can, should, and will carry out programs (policies and laws) for reasons of general order, general morality, and getting better. The state carries out programs for all three reasons. Here I do not divide “getting better” from practical gain, that is, from increased wealth and prosperity; I expect you to keep the distinction in mind.

-Not one in particular of morality, order, practicality, prosperity, or “getting better” always “wins out” in every case. We have to look at each case to see which factor is most important, and to see what we can stand. When in doubt, it is best to err on the sides of caution, morality, and order. It is best to make sure an act does more good than harm, however we think of good.

-Moral concerns can come before practical concerns. Sometimes the state acts primarily on the basis of morality, to redress a moral grievance, to guard a moral, or to advance a moral solution, and not primarily for order or prosperity, such as feeding school children. Yet the state cannot address all moral issues. The state is not required to seek moral perfection. Sometimes to address a moral issue is so costly in practical terms that the state cannot act to correct the moral issue, such as giving total medical care to all people of all ages no matter their previous condition. Sometimes to address one moral issue breeches general order so badly that the breach of general order is an even bigger moral breach, such as if we tried to force all people to show no gender or ethnic bias. Morality and general order usually coincide but sometimes not. Sometimes we must act morally even at practical cost, such as to educate all children or to steward nature. Sometimes an act that might be practically appealing, such as a dam for increased wealth, leads to moral breeches, such as taking property. Sometimes gain in practicality outweighs modest moral breeches. Morality and practicality often coincide but sometimes contradict.

-In all cases, the people, and their representatives, have to weigh the issues honestly and publically, and decide. The people, and their representatives, have to acknowledge all aspects of a case: moral, order, general order, getting better, and practicality. The people and their representatives have to clearly say their motives, clearly say which aspect they think dominates, and why. Again, it is best to err on the side of caution, in particular on the side of morality and general order.

-Individuals need not be equal in wealth, and very likely will not be. Differences in wealth are sometimes helpful.

-Individuals may not use their private property to pervert democratic self-government. Individuals may not use their private property to oppress other people or harm nature. If private ownership leads to constantly increasing differences in wealth, so as to undermine dignity and self-government, the state might have to intervene.

-People personally have to provide for their families. If they cannot provide for their families, they should not have families. The state may require people to pay for some expenses in raising a family such as for school and health care. People should take into account such added obligations when thinking whether they can raise a family. People cannot expect the state to take over the expenses of raising their family for them. People cannot expect the state to take over as a parent.

-Because of how capitalism runs and creates jobs, we inevitably have some unemployment and poor employment even among people of ability, training, and drive. This unemployment and poor employment will not go away. No simple policy or simple “tweak” can solve this problem. No increased wealth and not “making the pie bigger” alone can solve this problem. It is not true that “a rising tide floats all boats”. We have to accept that capitalism has problems, including unemployment and poor employment, and have to face them. We have to deal with problems without allowing abuses such as cheating and dependency. The problem of inevitable unemployment and poor employment sustains other problems and is a root deep issue. To do anything realistic about other problems, we first have to face this problem and have to face the twin issue that not everybody is competent to find work in a modern economy; see Part 5. The fact of inevitable unemployment and poor employment does not mean we have to make a job for everyone; we should not.

-While capitalism has problems, its problems do not change that each person individually is responsible for him-herself and his-her children; and people still cannot expect the state to step in.

-Real democracy is not fully populist and egalitarian. Real democracy has to be representative. People elect some of their fellows to serve them in government.

-A working democracy has to pick among the people who are qualified for self-government, as voters, officers, and representatives.

-America has done poorly with representative democracy. It has not figured how to pick among its people those who are qualified and how to exclude unqualified people.

-As noted above, the state is the guardian of general order, general morality, and general welfare. The state is limited to guarding general order, general morality, and general welfare. The state should not promote any morality or ideology not needed for general order, general morality, or general welfare, or not needed to stop an obvious excessive immorality.

-The state is not the agent of the morality, ideas of order, ideology, myth, or religion, of any particular group. The state cannot promote the ideas of any particular group in addition to ideas of general order and general morality.

-If a private act by an individual does not injure the general order or general morality, the state should have little to do with the act. If an act does not injure general order or general morality, the state should not prohibit the act. If an act does little harm or no harm, the state should not be concerned. The state should err on the side of caution and inaction. For example, homosexuality does no harm, and so is not the business of the state.

-Likewise, unless an act does considerable good, the state should not concern itself. Even if an act does noticeable good, the state should not necessarily concern itself. It might benefit all children if they joined the Scouts for ten years but that is not the business of the state.

-The state may force people to do acts that do clearly promote the general order such as force people to vaccinate their children. The state may force people to do such acts especially if not doing them hurts the general order, again as with vaccinations.

-State agents must perform their duties as agents of the general order, general morality, general welfare, and the state, with full fairness according to their duties, and without regard to their families, friends, gender, age, ethnic group, religion, socio-economic class, or place of origin.

-In addition to the rights in the Bill of Rights, people have the right to do as they wish as consenting adults as long as they do not harm other people and do not create a liability on the public.

-In addition to the rights in the Bill of Rights, people have a right to privacy.

-People have a right to be both smart and stupid. The state cannot, and should not, prevent people from acts that other people think stupid. The state may prevent actions that harm the public or create burdens on the state such as burning trash in the open or jumping off bridges.

-We cannot hurt nature so as to undermine nature, our fellows, or society. I believe we should not hurt nature very much at all and that the state should guard nature; but this value is not widely accepted yet.

-The state is not the agent for any group of wealthy or powerful people, or for any business group.

-People, and business firms, must pay taxes; taxes must be fair; and people and firms must pay fairly.

-Life is partly unfair. Social life is partly unfair. Business life is partly unfair. Social groupings are partly unfair. Real self-government is partly unfair. A capitalist economy is partly unfair. Usually the benefits of life outweigh unfairness, but not always. Usually the benefits of living in orderly self-governing democracy outweigh unfairness, but not always.

-As much as possible, the state should avoid policies that increase unfairness or that concentrates it on some groups.

-The state is the guardian of fairness. Traditionally "fairness" was "justice" but Americans have come to see justice in terms of fairness. Justice also is a value that distinguishes the Western idea of the state although states in other parts of the world did pursue justice. Although the benefits of living in a good

democracy outweigh unfairness, still unfairness remains an issue that we must face. The state is obliged to provide some fairness, hopefully as much as practically possible. The state has to address unfairness of the kinds listed in various places here. The state cannot provide perfect fairness and is not obliged to try. Citizens have to accept some un-fairness. The state cannot try to lessen unfairness in ways that add even more unfairness. The state cannot act to lessen unfairness in ways that cause more harm than good. The state has to control some unfairness between groups, such as racism and sexism. The state does not have to insure perfect fairness among groups.

-People may, and should, petition the state for some redress in unfairness and injustice. Redress cannot cause more harm than good. People cannot expect always to get what they want.

-As noted above, in real life, people are not equal in wealth and power. The state should not try to make everybody fully equal in those ways. Differences in wealth and power can lead to unfairness. The state can address resulting unfairness but cannot provide full fairness. Differences in wealth and power can harm freedom, self-government, rule of law, prosperity, and the economy. In those cases, the state can try to lessen differences as long as the state does more good than harm. Differences in wealth and power sometimes can augment prosperity and the economy; even in those cases, the state should not intervene to create differences, as in taxing rich people less than other people.

-When ecology, the economic system (such as capitalism), or prejudices such as based on gender, age, religion, or ethnicity, persistently create unfairness, the state is obliged to deal with the issue as best it can. The state cannot perfectly rectify the badness or create perfect fairness. The state can deal with the issue only to the extent that remedies cause less harm than the original unfairness. As part of the right to be stupid, people have to endure some bad results on the part of their fellows such as some of the bad results due to racial discrimination and sexism.

-Groups use appeals to fairness, general order, general morality, general welfare, or prosperity, as ways to manipulate the state into policies that favor them or as ways to become clients of the state. The state has to be on guard against this tendency and has to fight it. The state and the people have to point out when groups abuse fairness and have to stop them. Abuse of fairness, general order, general morality, general welfare, and prosperity undermines all of them and self-government too.

-The state may not pursue fairness to the point that the pursuit creates unfairness or other abuse. The state may not pursue fairness to the point that the harm done by pursuing fairness outweighs the good done by fairness. Moderation and restraint are a part of fairness.

-Good ideas tend to become bad dogma, such as the idea of fairness becomes dogmas of entitlement. The state has to pursue good ideas but guard against bad dogmas. The people are obliged to point out when good ideas become bad dogmas.

-You personally have to actively participate in self-government to the extent of your competence as a citizen, without becoming a harmful zealot. You have to work on being a good citizen. You cannot just let other people govern for you while you make money. You cannot just work on the issues of your group. If you are not adept enough, you have to make yourself adept enough. If you cannot make yourself adept enough, then stay out of the process and let other better people govern; but, find other ways to be useful.

-Enough people in your group have to actively participate in self-government without becoming harmful zealots. If not enough people in your group are adept citizens, or too many are bad citizens, then you have to change your group or leave it. The people in your group cannot just work on making money and letting other people govern for them. The people in your group cannot just work only on the issues of the group. Your group has to foster well-rounded adept citizens.

PART 3: Good People.

General Culture and Political Culture.

The character that makes a good citizen and good neighbor is as much a product of general culture and institutions as of political culture and institutions. The character that makes a good citizen of France is as much due to French culture as to the ideas and institutions that make up democracy. French democracy is a combination of general ideas about democracy with French culture. Nations can have a great paper constitution and, in form, have all the institutions that should support the paper ideal, but still not have the real culture, attitudes, and institutions that make the kind of people that make real democracy work. Third World and Communist nations were full of stymied unhappy would-be citizens; North Koreans still suffer on. America made good citizens through both political institutions and ideas and through its non-political culture and non-political institutions including family, schools, sports, peers, art, workplaces, labor unions, business firms, Christian churches, other churches, many religions, philosophies, movements for nature, and clubs. I cannot separate general culture from political culture. I only describe the kind of person that I want. I do not advise on how to develop the culture that develops these people.

Background.

Character and values come together. What follows are my ideas of character. When I wrote this, my wife and I lived with people who did not have good basic character, were not mostly decent, and too many had bad attitudes. We felt every day what we were missing and the damage done.

I am not ashamed to say that the kind of people I want are like characters in TV westerns such as "The Rifleman", "Gunsmoke", "Bonanza", and "Maverick". I like the great families of TV, especially the great dads such as Andy Griffith. The people I want are like good characters from classic western movies such as "Shane", "High Noon" (the real hero was a woman), and "9:10 to Yuma". The people would fit well into a movie by Frank Capra, for example "It's a Wonderful Life" or "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington", and that does make me blush a bit, but I live with it. These people are basically decent, but not too sweet, and with human flaws. They are the people you want for neighbors. I want the people who, if the world were less complicated and screwed up, would make good adept citizens.

I know the difference between good people and adept citizens. General culture is not the same as political culture but the two are inextricably mixed, and it is hard to have a good political culture without a good general culture. I know that a person can be an adept citizen but a nasty person, and a person can be a good person but inept citizen. I like: Judge Roy Bean, who ran court with .45; the character Judge "Dredd"; and Sergeant Striker. Still, in general, good people make fine citizens, and even fierce citizens have a big streak of goodness on which they base commitment to be an adept citizen – else, why bother?

We all learn the traits of an ideal adept citizen in civics class, so I do not dwell on them or try to separate the traits of adept citizens from good people. I list the traits of good people and I hope that “adept citizen” is in there too. In the next part of the chapter, I mention a couple of traits specifically of good citizens.

I appreciate rascals, anti-heroes, flawed heroes, crabby heroes, and even some gangsters, criminals, bad boys, and bad girls. But they don't make good neighbors or good citizens. When society has too many of them, enables them, or romanticizes them, society goes bad. Americans romanticize bad boys, bad girls, criminals, and fake rebels far too much. If you have ever known real criminals, you know they are not fun, interesting, or good to be around. The world is not going to run out of these people soon, so I don't have to defend them, so I don't have to include any tolerable versions of them here.

We need the combination of Jimmy Stewart and John Wayne from the movie “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance”, and we need them both to defend us against Lee Marvin. No matter how much we romanticize Lee Marvin, he really makes a bad neighbor and bad citizen.

Almost anybody who has internalized some American values - and now that includes most people around the world - can be like one of the people here. It doesn't take a saint. In today's confusing world, you might not be able to succeed as a fully adept citizen but you can be the kind of citizen who would have been adept in a saner more human world. You can be the kind of person who would have been an adept citizen during the American Revolution or Civil War. All you have to do is be honest and try harder than you are trying now. It helps to have a good situation. Most of us don't try hard enough, and we soon lose sight of what it means to be a good person and good citizen.

What I want is typical of a proud clean poor person, proud clean working middle class person, or proud clean other middle class person. I have found this person mostly among people whose background is Northwestern European, Northern European, and East Asian – Mr. Miyagi from “Karate Kid” is a case - but this kind of person is not limited to those backgrounds. Again, just because I take these people as my inspiration does not mean the ideas are wrong.

The point is not to make everybody into what I wish, have the state make all people into a character from a romantic comedy, or have religion make all people like a character from “The Flying Nun”. I don't want sweet zombies. I like differences. Without glamorizing, I even like some not-so-decent people. But I like some kinds of people more than others, and some kinds make good friends, neighbors, and citizens while some don't. The point is to give us standards that we can work toward.

Most people feel as I do, and share my tastes, but they won't say so from fear to appear un-cool or not PC (politically correct), either left or right.

I want religion to encourage values that make good neighbors. I want religion to condemn bad neighbors. I want ethnic groups to make people who are good neighbors. I want ethnic groups to condemn all their members who are bad neighbors and have bad attitudes. I want the state to control indecent people and bad people. I don't want the state to make everybody into the good person that I describe here.

Ideally, I would like people who can face and handle the hard issues of our times. Not all people are able to do this, and we have to take that limit into account.

I want people who can see that they cannot do it but are willing to seek out other people who are smarter and know more. This willingness to go beyond yourself is quite hard too.

General Character.

-I want decent people to prevail. See the chapter in this book on decency. I want them to set the tone for the world but not stamp the world. I want people who know decency from the heart, know why decency is important, and for whom decency is automatic in their character. Decent people follow the Golden Rule, have empathy, are considerate, value dignity, and help neighbors. They see beyond social, economic, or political status. They don't have to be told not to bother neighbors. They clean up after themselves and after others. They don't tolerate nonsense.

-I know that people other-than-fully-decent-people have to be in this world, and I don't usually mind as long as the not-fully-decent-people don't hurt decent people. The world needs its share of grafters and crooks. But indecent people have to be controlled so they don't hurt decent people.

-I do not want only stodgy boring people. I like people who have fun. I want people who make the world interesting. You can be a monk, or a lawyer, and have fun. Fun comes from various kinds of people.

-I want people who understand honor, duty, and responsibility.

-I want not all of the people, but many people, to be adventurous, including artists, scientists, and business people. This is part of having fun and making the world interesting. You can be a decent person and still be a creative person, who makes things, or gets things done. Not everybody is adventurous by nature, so don't feel bad if you aren't, but don't look down on people who are.

-You can be however you are as long as you don't hurt other people and animals. You can be moody, withdrawn, asocial, or rebellious. See the chapter on Taoism for other people that I also appreciate.

-I want people who really do work hard to make a better world. They don't need a grand vision of heaven-on-earth. They don't have to single-handedly save the world. They don't stick their noses in uninvited. They only have to see what needs work and be willing to help.

-I want people who understand "expect more from people who have more".

-I want people who understand good citizenship and who work to be good citizens to the best of their particular abilities.

-I want people who can temper justice with mercy but not let mercy undermine everything else.

-I do not hold it against people that they are "down and out", and cannot help other people now, but have to save themselves. Life can be really hard.

-I want people who have personally known some of the bad things in life, and maybe have been crushed for a while, but have not let it ruin them for always, who fought back after defeat, and so have learned to appreciate good even more. I want people who can feel for the other ruined people because they have been there themselves.

-I dislike indecent, loud, dirty, shortsighted, selfish people; people who do not feel the dignity of other people and themselves; and people who don't understand the idea of public spaces, public times, and the public good. I dislike people who "get mine first" or who make sure they "come out clean" ("aw tua roht" in Thai).

-I want people who see the difference between justified rebellion versus rebellion for silly reasons such as Romanticism, zealotry, fashion, and feeling good about yourself. I want people who can pick causes and can assess how to spend their time, energy, resources, and personality in causes. I want people who can join justified rebellion without lapsing into zealotry. I want people who can see when even justified rebellion has gone too far, is hurting more than it helps, and has to change. I want people who are disgruntled at times, suspicious of the system, and willing to buck the tide to get something done. I want some natural rebels. At the same time, I dislike people who rebel because they want to feel good about themselves, justify themselves, and save themselves.

-I have sympathy for the downtrodden, down and out, victims of the system, underbelly, and beautiful losers. I don't mind them. At the same time, I don't glamorize them. They don't always know better and are not always right. Sometimes they are not interesting. Sometimes they are more trouble than they are worth. I want people who are comfortable among outsiders but who don't glamorize them.

-I want people who are willing and able to judge an idea on its merits rather than its source. An idea is not better or worse because it comes from the underbelly of society, elite, rich, working class, Blacks, Whites, any religious group, any gender, or any political party. An idea is an idea. People have to be able to judge them correctly. This is a surprisingly rare and precious talent.

-John the Baptist, the teacher of Jesus, said that an official, Roman or Jewish, could be a good citizen of Judea, and the Kingdom of God, if he-she carried out the duties of his-her office correctly, honorably, with respect to law, and without favoritism toward any ethnic group, religion, wealth, or power. Today, we add without favoritism to gender, gender, age, handicap, and occupation. Briefly, officials have to respect the rule of law, and have to serve as examples of the rule of law. People in general have to see this of their officials, have to support their officials, and have to be ready to act this way if they become officials. My wife and I have lived where officials did not respect the rule of law, and it is horrible. Of course, we all cheat a little bit, and we all have a natural human tendency to favor our kin, friends, fellow ethnics, and fellow religion members. It is impossible to be perfect. But we have to fight to be better as officials, and we cannot let a system of cronyism replace a system of law.

-I want people who can blend individualism and team effort, and can vary the blend to suit situations. Despite American ideals about rugged individuals, in fact, teams succeed much more often. Too much group is bad as in collectivism but so also is too much individualism as in a ball-hog show-off. Most great TV shows and epics have been about teams rather than individuals even when one individual was the star: Star Trek, Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, Jesus and his Disciples, Moses, David, and Robin Hood.

Americans are among the best people in the world at teams, and that is one of the most important values in our successful democracy and economy. The American character is a blend of football and golf. We need to learn the best blend of individualism and team play. Not only do we need to learn it for specific situations, but we need to learn how to vary the blend when situations vary. This skill takes a lifetime of study under good teachers. Americans should be happy that they are lucky enough to have this skill.

-I want people who understand “live and let live”. Let people live as they wish as long as they don't hurt other people. This attitude is part of not wanting to make everybody like you. Not everybody who lives as he-she wishes is interesting, good, useful, or makes the world better. Some will be cranky, quirky, or loners. We have to accept that. If other people are obnoxious, you have the right to call them out and make them stop.

-I want people who see what hurts good citizenship and democracy, and who can “just say no” to those things even when those things might otherwise be valuable and might be esteemed in their group. For more on this point, see below.

-The best action is based on principles mixed with practicality. Best action always uses principles but it is not dogmatic. Best action does not fall into mere expedient practicality but always refers to some principles. Action based solely on ideology usually gets crazy and becomes a hidden tool of crazy self-interest. For example, calls for “fairness”, “equality”, “family”, and “free market” are usually about benefits for us. Action supposedly based on practicality usually does the same. We need much experience to learn to blend principles and practicality well, and I don't go into how to learn here. I want people who get this situation and are willing to learn. They don't have to be experts already but they do have to be willing to learn and they have to expect to continually improve. They have to be willing NOT to act until they have reached minimum ability – unless, of course, they have to act in a crisis. They have to know how to trust people with more ability than they have. They have to learn how to trust institutions that have been built on this idea.

-Institutions, including relations of ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic class, can be fair or unfair, can be fairly responsive to new conditions or unfairly mired in the past. No institution is completely fair. We have to decide how much unfairness we can stand before we move on to maybe something better with a different mix of fairness and unfairness. It takes pain to change unfair institutions even when we can see the unfairness we are in now and can see the fairness we need to get to. It takes pain to build any institutions anytime. I want people who see this even if not as clearly as Adams or Jefferson. I want people who see how institutions serve us in general, can serve particular groups, and disserve others. I want people who think out institutions, and who can guess well about when to change them and when to leave them alone. I want people who can figure out what to change them to when we have to change. I want people who can figure out how to change them with the least pain and unfairness. All this is hard and takes much learning. Mostly we do not learn by doing but by studying what people have done in the past and by watching skilled people now.

-People are equal under the law as persons but people are not equal in ability. People would still show differences even if everybody had exactly the same education and opportunities throughout life. We should try hard to provide children with opportunities but we should not expect all children to come out equally able. Differences in ability make a difference. Not all people should act as governors of the state.

Differences between individuals are not the same as differences between groups. Differences in groups appear and persist for reasons other than differences between people. I want people who know all this and take it into account. I want people who know the difference between equal opportunity versus forced equal outcome. I want people who know when inequality and unfairness perpetuates itself, and when to do something about it or when to leave it alone. I want people who can find a balance between giving people a chance versus destroying the play of individual talent and differences. I want people who know that some people are capable of self-government and others are not, and who recognize the ones who are and are not.

-I want people who can see that we do not own the Earth, we are its stewards. God owns it. We have to act accordingly.

-I end where I began. I want people who can accept the limits of their own ability as citizens and who seek out help beyond their limits.

I do not expect perfect people. Definitely I am not perfect. I don't want everybody to be like me. Not all the traits listed here are fully compatible. Full compatibility is not crucial. The traits here are compatible enough. The mismatch between the rough edges only makes the world more interesting.

To repeat: What I want is close to what most people want but most people won't say so out of misguided ideas of political correctness, from fear of the PC thought police Left, Right, and ethnic, and from fear of not being thought cool. Do better than that.

PART 4: Traits of a Good Citizen.

Five Specific Traits.

I elaborate below a little on some aspects of these traits.

(1) Don't get trapped by a dogma, ideology, party, group, church, cause, or movement. Step away from your dogma or party if it produces bad results. We all have to take some bad with the good, and we have to break eggs to make an omelet, but we also have to think on our own, practice thinking on our own, and stand up as individuals. I don't mind party politics but I do mind shills. American parties after Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, beginning with Ronald Reagan, have become legions of zombies. They are herds and crowds rather than individual human beings joining together for the common good. Do better.

Two examples of how people get mixed up in seemingly good groups but make mistakes: The first is the movement for nature, Earth, and environment. The second is young Republicans after Reagan, a group that was portrayed on the TV show "Family Ties" and is satirized in the TV show "American Dad". Who can deny the charm of these groups yet who can deny that too many people never evolved beyond the simplistic ideas, and the people who still live in the simplistic ideas hurt the country?

If your religious group, ethnic group, or gender activist group does not support good attitudes, and does support bad attitudes, then step away from it. Start another branch of your group that does support good attitudes and condemns bad attitudes.

(2) Get the facts. I know it is hard in today's world to find the facts but it can be done. The Internet can even help. Don't rely on parties or ideological groups for facts. Find out if crime in America has gone up or down, and among which groups. Find out if global climate change is real and, if real, what causes it. Find out if drugs really hurt people. Find out what kind of guns facilitate deaths in America. Find out if rich people are really getting all the wealth. Find out if middle class incomes have stagnated. Find out why. Find out which socio-economic class pays the biggest share of income in taxes. Find out if middle class people get benefits from the state that they don't see as benefits such as police protection, parks, and low college tuition for their children. Find out if police kill more Blacks or Blacks kill more police. Find out who kills Blacks. In essays outside this book I explain why it is hard to find the facts, and why people have to make decisions not based on facts.

(3) Find out how the major institutions of our times really work, in particular capitalism. Don't accept the right wing ideology that capitalism would be perfect except for the nasty meddling state. Don't accept the left wing dogma that capitalism is simply a ruse to help rich people loot and enslave others, in particular Blacks. Ask the questions above. Find out how capitalism helps and hurts particular groups. Find out why we have chronic unemployment and have more bad jobs now than before. Think about what to do with all the people who are not smart enough to find a decent job in the modern world economy.

Don't accept Black dogma that their plight is due completely-and-only to prejudice by others, that Blacks have no part in their plight, and Blacks cannot be prejudiced. What role do Black attitudes play? Don't accept White dogma that all White ideas and institutions are better just because there were a few smart White men a few hundred years ago or a few thousand years ago. Jesus was not a European.

(4) Make up your own mind. Do the right thing for the right reasons.

(5) Little can be done on the basis of pure rationality alone, as above. We need causes, and we need to join causes. Causes such as for nature, gay rights, and a small state, help America more than they hurt America. We would not have had the American Revolution and the spread of democracy if Americans after 1760 had not been a bit crazy. We need to mix rationality and commitment, a mix that we can see in great documents such as the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Federalist Papers. So, go ahead and commit to good causes but also use your sanity.

See the Big Picture; Don't Selfishly Assume Your Own Competence.

Nearly all people mistakenly think they have the skills to be an adept citizen just because they were born. People think they make adept citizens because of their formal education, lack of formal education, street smarts, cleverness, glibness, gender, political party, gun ownership, dislike of guns, religion, atheism, age, occupation, being in business, having a profession, being a working person, having children, socio-economic class, or that they feel like a rebel. None of that automatically qualifies you as an adept citizen, and thinking any of it does automatically qualify you likely automatically disqualifies you.

The Founders of the United States wanted not wide-spread populist democracy but representative self-government where the representatives were a natural elite of smart, educated, and experienced people. Most rich people, business people, college-level academics, doctors, lawyers, other professionals, and

many high school teachers, feel they are automatically part of the natural elite when they are not. Their wealth, education, and experience are useful but do not automatically make them adept worthy leaders.

The only things that make you an adept citizen are training, experience, enough talent, and practice. You have to work hard at it. You have to get outside yourself to see the big picture.

Assume democracy is sacred. To the extent that people act as self-proclaimed adept citizens when they are not, they violate what is sacred. You insult God. If democracy really is a sacred duty, then you have to do the work and muster the courage to help what is good. There is no shortcut.

Some people cannot be adept citizens because they are not smart enough, are not smart enough in the right ways, never had the background, can't get it, or won't work on it.

If you are not an adept citizen, then don't act as one. If you are not prepared to vote wisely, don't vote. If you cannot assess issues, then don't vote and don't agitate. To exercise the power of a citizen without being qualified is bad citizenship. Bad citizenship hurts the people, the state, your group, and you.

Even if you don't have the skill to be an adept citizen, you can still serve God. There is much you can do short of being one of the citizen governors. Nearly anybody can work for charities and can give. Nearly anybody can support a church, synagogue, mosque, or temple. Nearly anybody can help a neighbor or animal. If you are not qualified to be a good citizen, then work on what you can do, and be satisfied with that. Don't try to run the world, or run a country, if you can't.

Good Citizenship Takes Work.

The economist Thomas Sowell said the discipline of economics hinges on asking the question "and then what?" over and over again until we came close to seeing what really happens, to bedrock. This practice is true not only of economics but also of adept citizenship. You have to find facts and ask questions until you have a good handle on what will really happen if a policy is enacted or not enacted. It is not enough to look at surface results. You have to look at a chain of events. You need a feel for nature, human nature, values, and institutions. You have to be honest enough not to stop at a result that pleases you but to go beyond that level to the real bottom. This skill takes experience and practice. If being a good citizen is part of following your religion correctly, then you have to work at good citizenship, to the extent that you are able, to be "right with God".

Some easy examples: A sales tax is easy to levy but hurts poor people. If a poor, middle class, and rich family all spend \$1000 a month on groceries, the poor family spends 30% of its income, the middle class family spends 10%, and the rich family spends 1%. A 10% sales tax (\$100) on top is a serious burden to the poor family, annoying to the middle class family, and nothing to the rich family. Education is a good thing. But, if we support education by taxing houses, then old people will never pass a levy, and, if a levy does pass, then old people will leave. Social Security Disability (Insurance) started as a modest program of a few hundred million dollars to help physically crippled people. Now it costs tens of billions of dollars, and is pushed by lawyers on TV. This expansion could have been foreseen and headed off. If we invade Iraq, topple Saddam Hussein, and disband his military, without building a central order to fill the vacuum, what will happen? We should have seen that coming. If we tell Syria that chemical weapons is a "line in

the sand” and they use chemical weapons anyway, then what? If Russia invades the Ukraine, can we win a tank war in Eastern Europe? Can we win a war on all drugs including marijuana and powdered cocaine? What happens if we continue to fight drugs or if we legalize some instead? What happens if some states ban abortion entirely but some other states keep it legal?

Why are the citizens and politicians in America so inept at seeing the train of events that runs through the various cases? What can we do to make people more astute? If we cannot make all people more astute, how can we limit voting and holding office to people who are astute enough?

Good Citizenship Requires Looking Beyond Yourself.

Around election time in America, pundits say “people vote their pocketbook”. When Ronald Reagan ran for election and re-election, he asked people if they were better off now than four years ago. By “better off”, he meant materially better off. Although the vast majority of people think this way, it is wrong. It is bad. To repeat from above: Democracy cannot just be about material wealth. Lots of countries in the past were materially wealthy, but they were not democracies, and Americans now would not want to go there to live. If all you want is wealth, go to China and join the Communist Party.

You have to look beyond yourself. You have to see what is best for the whole country. What is best for the country includes material prosperity but it cannot be limited to material prosperity. What is best for the country is what cultivates free, intelligent, creative, responsible, respectful, decent, good people. What is best for the country is what cultivates good citizens. You have to seek that first. You have to vote for candidates that understand that and work for it.

You are not a good citizen if you vote strict party lines, for the Black guy, White guy, Hispanic, woman, Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, pro-lifer, pro-choicer, cool guy, bad boy, bad girl, or charmer. Don't vote for the candidate who promises you a big entitlement or guaranteed economic development. If you feel you should vote for the candidate of your group just because he-she is the candidate of your group, then your group is teaching you wrong. You need to rise above your group.

“Just Say ‘No’”.

If you or your group do anything to undermine the values above, or do not support them strongly enough, then you undermine good citizenship. I mention two specific acts to avoid.

People need to avoid what undermines good citizenship and development even when sometimes that practice is otherwise good and when it is valuable in their culture. Learning not to do what seems useful in the short run takes a lifetime of learning under good teachers. Learning this is like learning to be a good official and finding the right balance between group and individual. We cannot all be like the great “Noble Romans” who gave up their lives, and the lives of their families, for the sake of Rome; but we can learn to give up one benefit for ourselves or our narrow group for the sake of a greater benefit for our country and all democracy.

Family is an important value but sometimes we have to put democracy ahead of our families. Friendship is an important value but sometimes we have to put democracy ahead of friends. When a cousin comes

to ask for a job sometimes we have to say “no”. When a fellow Greek or Christian comes to ask for a job sometimes we have to say “no”. When we owe somebody a favor, the payback can’t be to allow him-her to do something against the benefit of everybody else. If we work for the park bureau, we can’t let our political party have the public park for a private party. We can’t let a rich person hunt endangered goats in a national park even if his-her bank holds our mortgage. We can’t give high grades to school kids just because we are the same ethnic group any more than we can give low marks to kids because they are in a different group. Poor people allow other poor people to act noisy or dirty so that someday, if the need arises for themselves, other people will allow them leeway. If I let you be loud for your party, you will let me be loud for my party. This is a good value when it does no general harm. It is good to live and let live. It is good to bend the letter to serve the spirit. But not enforcing a rule lets the whole neighborhood get dirty and loud all the time, and not enforcing this rules says that all rules are arbitrary, meaningless, stupid, and breakable. Often we have to see beyond our little social bargains for the sake of the whole. Don’t ask for what is generally hurtful. Don’t expect it. Don’t give it.

Learning to say “no” is like learning when to forego a personal benefit so as to avoid a higher cost to the neighbors or so as to gain a greater benefit for the neighbors. It is like not letting your dog shit in the yards of the neighbors. The difference is that the stakes are much higher. Democracy is at stake, not money or comfort. When we say “yes” to friendship, family, ethnicity, religion, or cronies, over rule of law, there is a gain; but we undermine all of democracy.

Instances of My Group versus the Country.

In the 1950s and 1960s, America owned the world economy. That was not a realistic situation, could not continue, and the benefits that came from it cannot continue. America is still an important country for the world economy but it no longer owns the world economy. America has to compete with Europe, India, China, Brazil, Japan, Korea, and others. While America dominated the world economy, it gave some internal groups benefits that could not continue under normal competition. Even if the benefits, to some extent, make up for past injustice and create present justice, they cannot continue. The benefits make the country as a whole, or some groups in it, support the receiving group. The support undermines the whole country so now the whole country is the victim of injustice and unfairness. It is bad citizenship to expect these benefits to continue and bad citizenship to allow the benefits.

When a benefit is based on a political grant, this almost always happens: the group that gets benefits votes en masse on the benefits as a key issue. The benefits become a one-issue “deal breaker” or “deal maker”. If a politician talks about removing benefits, the group votes against that politician, and gets him-her removed from office, no matter how otherwise good the politician is. So politicians are afraid to take away benefits. Other groups see the benefits, see that the benefits put the first group at an advantage, feel disadvantaged, and demand their own benefits in compensation. Soon we have a tangled tissue of benefits-groups-and-politicians. Soon we have in office only politicians who can work with this kind of benefits system, whether they like it or not. If the receiving group has used the benefits to improve, and has shown promise that it would someday not need benefits, then it might make some sense to continue the benefits until the receiving group was “on its feet”. But, in nearly all cases in practice, the receiving group does not “grow up”. We have to carry that group and all other groups indefinitely. As with parents, we cannot carry our children forever.

The same is true when benefits are based on the economic equivalent of a political grant, when workers get unusual wage-and-benefits packets from successful companies on the wrong assumption that the firm will be unusually successful forever. This happened in the 1950s and 1960s with American companies such as airlines and automakers, and their unions, so-called “sweetheart unions” and “sweetheart deals”. The dynamics are not quite the same as with political deals but the gist is similar enough, including rivalry between unions for deals, so as not to go into details.

Examples include:

- Voting ethnic.
- Voting gender.
- Voting religion.
- Entitlement programs for individuals and families.
- “Corporate welfare” including subsidies, loopholes, tax breaks, depreciation allowance, other allowances, support for research, etc.
- Affirmative Action.
- Farm Aid.
- Lower taxes on the wealthy than on other socio-economic classes in society.
- Many indirect subsidies to the middle class such as for college. Either extend the benefits to all people or end them for all.
- Lower profit taxes on some business firms, especially when not applied equally to firms of all sizes.
- Support for house buyers such as for mortgage interest.
- Support to small business firms.
- Sales tax.
- Aid to couples with more than two children.
- Support for single parents.
- Support for the children of irresponsible parents.
- Retirement, health care, and other benefits that were negotiated while America dominated the world economy, both from private firms and for government programs.

PART 5: Comments on Institutions and Values.

Good Institutions.

See comments above about political culture and general culture.

The line between values, traditions, and institutions is fuzzy. Christmas is all three, as are: “one person, one vote”, “no taxation without representation”, birthdays, and wedding anniversaries. Ideally, we want good institutions to come from good values, re-make the good values out of which they come, recall old traditions, not change traditions too much, and use traditions to re-make good values without betraying the traditions. You should judge for yourself how well this all works where you live.

I do not spell out good institutions. Refer to any textbook of civics. Good state institutions are based on rule of law and the laws are based on Western ideals of decency and persons. Good private institutions are based on ideals of service and progress.

Good institutions come from decent people and from people who live by the ideals of Jesus and the West. People do not have to be Christians or explicit followers of Jesus; they just have to know the ideals and try to live by them. Good institutions do not come easily from people who do not know the values. Good institutions include good government, citizenship, science, schools, hospitals, medical care, enduring charities such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent, B'nai B'rith, temporary charities such as aid to victims of a storm, aid to animals and nature, camps for children, support groups for victims of abuse or disease, giving to find cures for disease, support for research, support for the arts, support for good citizenship such as the League of Women Voters, support for responsible fair capitalism such as with Public Interest Research Groups and the work of Ralph Nader, sports programs, and all kinds of volunteer work.

Good institutions include both formal institutions and attitudes. We need to support values of honesty, honor, trustworthiness, dignity, and sacrifice – without prudishness. Virtue is an institution, and we need to support virtue in our attitudes.

Good institutions do public work such as educate children and help the needy. We can look to the state for help with some of this work but we should not rely on the state. We should not rely on the state to do the bulk of the work, leaving private action to mop up what the state forgets. We should engage in private work regardless of what the state does.

Good education includes not just sending your child off to a building but valuing knowledge, judgment, and learning yourself. It includes being able to teach your child – at least up through grade school. It includes having a good relation with teachers and insisting that teachers have skill.

My admiration for good institutions comes from seeing them as a child in Oregon, from seeing Christian groups overseas, and from seeing Christian groups in the American South. As a child, I benefitted a lot from good schools and from programs of the YMCA and local Christians. The Christians in the American South roll up their sleeves and get to work personally. They do not merely give money, although they do give money. They give time. They do not fear personal contact. I disagree with much of their dogma but their actions speak louder than their words or my words. I was impressed with Buddhist institutions in Thailand, in particular Buddhist schools, Buddhist priests, and health care workers. I was impressed by the dedication of the health care workers and by many teachers. The Thai have not developed the link between individual action and institutions such as was developed in Christianity, as in a Christian school or hospital, but the Thai see the ideals and work toward them, and they do so without having to become stereotyped Christians.

Although we should work on our own regardless of what the state does, we should also expect the state to do some of the work. We can expect the state to help the poor and the sick to some extent. The state should not rely on private charity to do some things such as help sick children. Some of our good work can be directed through state institutions although not all of our good work should be directed through state institutions. (Lifelong civil servants who work primarily for the good of the people can rest confident that they have done well.) We should expect the state NOT to provide help that enables dependants on the state, including persons, business firms, or groups such as charities. How much the state does, and how much we do, I cannot go more here.

The importance of good institutions and traditions is the mutual support between them, character, values, and a democracy. None can work apart from the others. All are needed. When most are running well, they can help the whole state recover from some badness, as when the United States recovered after the Civil War, the Great Depression, and the economic shocks of the 1970s. This is why it takes so long to describe institutions and traditions, and why I don't do it here. What really needs explaining are mutual relations, how they go well when they do go well, what can go wrong, how to fix it when it does go wrong, and when to worry about serious trouble.

Part of ideal (but not often real) conservative ideology is that we should change institutions and traditions only slowly. Traditional institutions evolved because they work, usually better than anything we can make by conscious design. Change usually leads to less freedom, less welfare, worse morality, less morality, and a worse state than before. Especially the institutions that America inherited from Britain were useful and good, and we should not change them. This conservative idea is mostly true but not fully true; I doubt we want a hereditary ruling class of rich lords just because England had it, and we don't want to stop the free market because England in 1700 didn't have it. I do not simply endorse the conservative position but I understand the position. This conservative view should be assessed in the context of other conservative positions and many liberal positions. I can't do that here.

Not Enabling; the Golden Rule (1).

People misunderstand the Golden Rule. It does not mean: "give people whatever they want regardless of the cost to you, your family, groups that don't get the benefit, and the nation; give regardless of whether giving really helps the receivers or really hurts; and give to this group because they squawk loudly even if another groups needs the help more and can do more with the help". The Golden Rule is not a charter for doormats, passive aggression, enabling, entitlements, benefits programs, justifying yourself through charity, or feeling good about yourself. The Golden Rule means to really treat people as you wish to be treated, and should be treated, including not "helping" if "helping" really hurts, and including being tough if that is what you (they) need. If I were an abusive selfish ass who demanded, I should not want people to enable me. I should want them to straighten me out and do what is good for me. When we base help on the Golden Rule, we have to give what really helps. The Golden Rule is not an excuse to keep lower groups down by making them slaves of the state and of their own bad values.

Jesus wanted us to help people, really help people. He did not want us to help people in ways that feel good for them now, and feel good for us now, but hurt in the long run. He did not want us to give token help to other people so really we can feel better about ourselves. He did not want us to help some people in ways that hurt other people more. Jesus would not want us to enable people with issues. We do not take candy from children. Likewise, we do not take candy from quiet children to give to screamers, and we do not give children candy so their teeth rot and they suffer all their lives. Jesus would not loan money to a chronic gambler or hire a compulsive embezzler to keep the books. He would not hire a child molester to babysit. Jesus would not hire cheating bankers to guard themselves. He would not condone race discrimination, gender discrimination, or reverse discrimination. He would not want zealous political correctness of left or right. He would not support corporate welfare or giving to affluent farmers at the expense of the urban poor. He would not levy a regressive tax like the sales tax. He would not tax the rich less than the poor. I do not really know the mind of Jesus but I do understand the logic of helping and I feel free to use Jesus to make a point.

There is a big difference between helping people personally versus helping through the state. I leave it to you to figure out personal aid. Here, I comment about aid through the state, especially aid through the state done in the name of Jesus' teachings.

America has real problems such as unemployment, health care, and racial discrimination. As long as we have these problems, we have to run some state programs such as welfare. We have to give through the state. We have to use the state as an instrument of the Golden Rule. I do not like this situation because it leads to enormous confusion and bad policy, but it is what it is, and we have to deal with it.

State programs do help people. They also turn people into dependants, hurt the character of people, encourage people to go down the path of bad character, encourage children to go down the same bad path as bad parents, and they hurt everybody else – the general welfare - in the long run. Programs encourage bad people to blackmail good people. For example, bad parents use children to force good people into giving bad parents aid so the children do not suffer. Children that might otherwise have been good parents follow the example of bad parents, become bad parents themselves, and teach the next generation to blackmail good people.

When we think of bad enabling, usually we think of programs for people such as welfare, food stamps, and disability. In fact, much bad aid comes through programs such as mortgage subsidies and tax breaks to help business firms. Middle class people, business firms, and "job creators" are as much the blackmailers of the general good will as are poor people. We enable dependent middle and upper class households and business firms as much as poor people. Overall, in the long run, programs to help business firms so as to boost the economy likely do more harm than other programs because of how badly they distort the economy.

Jesus would not want this. We have to find the right line between helping people who deserve it while not helping bad people and not causing greater problems. I am not sure how other countries do, but America has been bad at finding this line.

When trying to figure how much to help through the state and how much to leave alone through the state, when trying to figure out "what would Jesus do through the state", we have to not abuse the scriptures. We cannot distort scriptures to validate what we want. We cannot distort the scriptures to validate: "They are all abusers; don't help anyone except me and us". "We can only help people who would have made responsible good businessmen if only they had not fallen on bad times." "The poor deserve it; so screw them." We cannot distort the scriptures to validate "we have to throw vast sums of money at the poor and we have to give minorities first crack at jobs".

For example, I had a friend who wanted to interpret the parable of the Good Samaritan as a warning not to get in trouble and so to need state help because of your trouble. People can foresee trouble, and so people who get in trouble have only themselves to blame, and certainly they should not get state help. If you get in trouble when you could have avoided it, then you should not get state help. My friend is an independent self-reliant good-hearted fair American. The merchant in the parable who got hurt by bandits bears much of the responsibility because he knew where bandits were and should not have gone there. In the same way, poor people who do not work hard to get an education, willfully fat people, people who

do not exercise, smokers, bad investors, people who build houses where it likely floods or burns, etc. do not deserve help from the state. People who have children when they cannot support the children do not deserve state help. We should not enable them out of a false sense of goodwill and moral obligation. I agree with his conclusion but I disagree with him using Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan to support the conclusion. The parable is not primarily about these issues and should not be distorted to apply to these issues. The parable does not teach us to evaluate the "enabled" or "deserving" status of a neighbor first. It teaches us to help personally with our own hands and our own resources. It does not teach us to help through the state. It does not teach us to avoid help through the state. It does not teach we should be angry because the merchant was an idiot to ride through country infested by bandits; it does not teach us to abandon the poor because they did not get a good education when they should have. If you feel my friend's conclusion is correct, and the scriptures support you, then you should be able to find support in other passages. If we want to use scriptures, we have to read them, know our own biased hearts, and think hard to figure out what is best. Jesus would approve of that.

Individuals and Equality; the Golden Rule (2).

I am an American, and Americans are often accused of putting too much stress on individuals. Modern democracy requires that we value each individual but, to make democracy work, we need not see each person exactly as Americans idealize individuals. I like the American stress on individuals but I want to put it in proper realistic perspective.

To stress individuals, we have to see all individuals as persons equally, with equal dignity, equal rights, and equal responsibilities. When we see individuals as equal in those ways, we tend to extend equality in other ways.

This extending of equality is not necessarily wrong but can go too far. Americans have tended to push it too far, especially since the 1960s. Americans overlook differences, even important differences in ability, talent, training, life history, family history, and earned station. No matter how equal before the law might be Mozart and some garage band banger, they are not equal in all ways. Some people are more adept at democracy than others. Some people are not adept at all. Some people are smart enough to make a good living in modern capitalism; some are not.

We have to find the right balance between the autonomous-dignified-legal-and-moral individual versus the fact of differences in real individuals, histories, outcomes, and the need for social organization made up of different roles. We have to do this without submerging the individual in some totalitarian idea of the good of the whole.

As part of stressing the individual, and as a value in itself, some Americans stress not just equal before the law, and not just equal in opportunity, but equal in outcome, as, for example, some Americans wish to redistribute wealth so that everybody is in the middle class range. I love equality but this view is too much stress on equality. While Affirmative Action was a good idea in the 1960s, it is not a good idea now, and it is an example of stressing equality of outcome despite the fact of bad results.

To better see the individual, and to avoid mistakes about the individual, it is useful to see how ideas of the individual and of equality can be traced to basic concepts, including the Golden Rule and its kin concept

“applies equally” (from Immanuel Kant). I repeat some comments here in the chapter on Confucius, where I also ask you to remember them for other religions and cultures.

Just as the Golden Rule does not mean to give indiscriminately, the Golden Rule does not mean to treat everybody exactly equally regardless of age, gender, talent, ability, achievement, power, family status, status in the state, or social rule. Yet it does tend toward treating people equally regardless of situation. We have to find how to treat people as we wish to be treated, fairly equally, while accepting good social relations that include differences, and without reinforcing bad distinctions. We have to find how to treat everybody almost equally without vaporizing all categories, especially useful ones. We have to find how to act in accord with useful social divisions while still treating everyone as we wish to be treated, as a person like us, without always treating people exactly the same. The West has been lucky in being able to find this right balance often.

A teacher does not treat students the same way he-she treats other teachers, and students do not treat the teacher the same way they treat other students; and this is all correct. Students who get to be the teacher later want to be treated as teachers should be treated, not as I-the-student is treated now. Jesus himself did not expect his disciples to treat him as they treated other disciples and as he treated them. Jesus did not treat his disciples as he treated God and as he expected God to treat him. We have to take relations and circumstances into account.

Taking relations and circumstances into account does not mean we use the Golden Rule as an excuse to reinforce bad unfair harmful relations and positions, such as a social order founded on wealth alone, fear, power, or on an economic system that reinforces wealth differences. On the contrary, the Golden Rule has an inherent push to equality. It forces us to think of other persons as persons just like us, and so to treat everybody on that basis. When we treat everybody on that basis, we tend to treat them equally with little regard to station, wealth, and power. Jesus reinforced this tendency when he washed the feet of his followers, hung out with tax collectors and prostitutes, ate meals with Roman soldiers, and respected poor people. Jesus pushed the tendency in the Golden Rule toward equality. Jesus pushed the Rule to its limits. Jesus pushed the limits of society by using the Golden Rule. We do well when we follow Jesus this way. This is why good Christianity fights against slavery when it can fight against slavery, and why good Christians see slaves, women, and “others” as full persons. The Buddha Siddhartha Gautama, and the Taoist Chuang Tzu, did much the same.

Taking relations and circumstances into account does not mean to respect every way everybody wants to be treated and every social distinction. Some social relations and positions are bad, and should not be treated with respect, even when we can imagine we might be there someday. When haughty people wish to be admired, we don’t have to. When rich-and-powerful people wish to be obeyed, we might have to obey from fear but not because we act as if we know how rich-and-powerful people wish to be treated and we respect that as part of our common humanity.

This is why modern democracies stress the idea of “applies equally”, “equality under the law”, and “rule of law”. “Applies equally” means to make no law that does not also apply to you; if you want people to follow a law, you have to follow it too; if you don’t want to follow a law, you can’t expect other people to follow it either. “Applies equally” treats most people as if they were simply adult persons but it does accept some differences. “Applies equally” etc. are the institutional expressions of the fact that the Golden Rule is

based on persons and the Rule pushes toward equality but does not demand absolute equality. We don't apply the same laws equally to adults as to children, or to mentally handicapped people as to normal adults. "Applies equally" etc. allow the law to respect justifiable distinctions. "Applies equally" etc. are the right institutional expression of the balance between treating everybody as we wish to be treated, treating everybody equally, yet not treating everybody as exactly the same, still respecting important useful distinctions, but not respecting harmful distinctions. The West has been lucky to put the Golden Rule and its institutional expressions of "applies equally" etc. into our political life. Democracy would not have been possible without Jesus' idea of the Golden Rule, not even using only Greek ideas. It was only possible with Jesus' idea of the Golden Rule, combined with Greek ideas about "applies equally", combined with English ideas of fair play, and with English institutions.

Although I write as an American and I share the American idealization of individuals and equality, my background does not mean a stress on them is wrong. Democracy needs both stress on individuals and equality, and respect for fair and reasonable differences.

Different traditions, such as in Latin America or Asia, will put different "spins" on the value of the individual and the push toward equality but still they need both. Americans will be able to learn from the realizations of individual dignity and individual equality found in other places.

PART 6: Failing Democracy and Its Lessons.

Failing Democracy.

Democracy, even in America, likely has been failing since about 1900, and certainly has been failing at least since 1929 (Great Depression), more since World War Two (first proliferation of bad entitlement programs including corporate welfare), after 1973 (rise of the world economy), after the middle 1970s (entitlement defeats good citizenship), and heavily after 1981 (simplistic rightist backlash and more corporate welfare). We citizens have let down ourselves, our nation, the human world, and nature. Yet I urge people to act as good citizens. Why? Why not just "get yours"?

Before answering, it is important to make clear that America now has a combination of simplistic populist democracy and rule by the rich. Sometimes mass movements prevail, sometimes the rich, and often the rich use the masses to push the country where the rich want to go. Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, and, sometimes, George W. Bush, are offered as examples of good rich people stepping up to lead the masses in a good direction. There are bad rich people who successfully push the country but I cannot list any for fear of law suit. It is not important to decide for sure whether rule by the rich or by mass populism dominates, and how it all works, but only to know that we have a mix of both.

The textbook answer to "why be a good citizen now?" comes in two parts: First, democracy might be a bad system but everything else is worse, so we have to support democracy.

This platitude is partly true. It is true if we compare democracy to anti-democratic systems such as firm monarchy, dictatorship, tyranny by a community, tyranny from political correctness left or right, rule by the rich, by religion, dogma, and by one group such as the Communist Party, Religious Right, business firms, or soccer moms. The platitude is false if we compare the real democracy that we do have to better forms

of democracy that are not merely idealistic and could be practical and real. The platitude also is false if we think we can do better under another system such as mild fascism in which we get security from the state, we are allowed to carry on business fairly freely, and the state protects our ethnic or religious group from falling too far down.

I favor the original view of the Founders, representative democracy where the country is run by an elite group of natural aristocrats who are smart, educated, and experienced. I do not discuss alternatives to our current version of democracy in this book because this book is not about that and because people are not likely to revert to the Founders soon. I do discuss alternatives in essays apart from this book.

Second, democracy is messy, complex, and full of gassy ferment. People have many stupid ideas and half-smart ideas but also have good ideas. Eventually the good ideas rise to the top; people will know good ideas, and will use primarily good ideas to govern well. Good leaders will emerge as champions of good ideas. The “masses” are “creative chaos” out of which goodness and truth magically emerge (see the chapters in this book on Issues and Romanticism). Any attempt to channel the masses and to instill better democracy necessarily suppresses all goodness and all truth. Even the representative democracy that I prefer is too much stifling.

This second answer too is more false than true. We have deep problems yet we have done nothing definitive to deal with them. We won't face them and deal with them. Goodness, truth, good ideas, and good leaders do not magically emerge. Populism failed. The rich have not stepped in to provide good ideas, programs, and leaders. The rich have floundered as much as the masses. So, instead, people seek dogma and security. The rich seek security and they offer the masses the dogma that helps the rich find much security and the masses find enough security. The masses are not ideal creative chaos from which goodness is guaranteed to emerge and prevail. Too often, the masses are nasty chaos from which bad state programs and bad leaders have emerged. Before about World War One, we might have gotten by with this simplistic myth of truth and goodness magically rising from populist democracy, guided by the rich, but the world now is so hard that we cannot get by this way anymore.

To support our inferior system of simplistic populist democracy and guidance by the rich is to betray the truth and all the people. As with the hypocrisy that says every culture and ethnicity is equally adept at democracy, we can no longer afford hypocrisy about democracy itself, and likely already it is too late.

Here is why I support good citizenship anyway. First, the people who make good citizens in a struggling plural populist-plutocratic democracy are the same ones who make good neighbors in almost any system. They are the people who might ease us into a more decent future. Even if populist-plutocratic democracy does not work, I want these people to prevail. Only if we have many of them could self-government work. It is worth cultivating these people so we have good neighbors, in the hope that self-government can work, and that good people can prepare us for the future.

Second, even if democracy does fail, and the world suffers, that does not mean we personally should not act morally and should not try. Good personhood and good citizenship are good in themselves. The question is not whether to try but how to try in our particular arena. This situation, this question, is at the heart of every good detective story: how to be a moral person in an immoral or amoral world. We should go down fighting. We know how to act well, and we should act well even in a world where decency never

prevails. Don't fool yourself that this stance is glorious sacrifice in a Romantic lost cause. You are not part of a rebel band fighting the evil empire. You are not a Klingon in glorious battle. You simply see what is right and do it as best you can.

Since I was a child, I loved populist democracy and thought it one of the most sacred things on Earth and in human life in all of human history. One of the hardest tasks of my life has been accepting the failure of populist democracy and the failure of many of its institutions. This realization is much deeper than feeling that "Washington stinks". For decades, I resisted this truth and I hoped.

What is Wrong Now.

I can't explain in detail what is wrong now. I mentioned some of it above. Not facing issues is cause and effect. We don't face big issues because we feel democracy is failing and democracy fails because we won't face big issues. I cover what is wrong in more detail in essays outside this book.

Much of the problem comes because we do not have good representative democracy in which people of ability and experience guide us. We have mass populist democracy in which most voters are not adept citizens and so are prone to dogma, bad voting, bad policies, avoiding issues, and following bad leaders. People of wealth and power lead the nation mostly for their benefit while making the people feel as if the people lead. Amazingly, in the past, people of wealth and power often did a good job. In seeking their benefit they also helped the country; they knew their benefit depended on the welfare and security of the country. America got by this way until the middle 1970s. Even present populist-democracy-led-by-the-rich-and-powerful would not be so bad except that the world is too difficult even for people of power and wealth. People of wealth and power are no longer good enough leaders for a country like America in the modern world.

Regardless of particular times and issues, democracies always tend to fall into a bad pattern where the mass of people are not adept citizens and bad demagogues arise. Plato and Aristotle described it well 2400 years ago. America had this tendency too, and has had bad episodes, but was able to rise above the badness and return to a good track until about the 1970s. Because of bad problems, that we will not face and deal with, since at least 1929, America has slid into the bad pattern repeatedly and it has been continually harder to come out. We slid permanently into the bad pattern about the middle 1970s and certainly after 1981.

It is worth recalling the bad pattern. When faced with hard problems, interest groups spring up based on business, ethnicity, religion, occupation, and socio-economic class. Everybody tries to use the state as a patron. Groups turn good ideas into bad dogmas to use as tools. People turn to bad leaders. When the problems recur in various ways, people fear. As fear spreads and takes root, people press for even more populism, which they mistake as real democracy, and the pattern reinforces itself.

Democracy as such is not the root problem. The masses by themselves are not the root problem. Some forms of representational democracy are good under the right conditions. Good ideas that get abused as dogma, such as "fairness", "rights", and "freedom", are not the root problem. They get turned into bad dogma only in some conditions. Rich and powerful people are not usually the root problem. Some rich and powerful people have acted as good leaders throughout American history.

The conditions that spoil democracy arise when democracy faces problems that are too hard for simplistic populism guided by the rich. Democracy can spoil for other reasons, but this reason matters for us now.

Some conservatives see the root weakness of democracy entirely in populist democracy and criticize its role only, especially the mutual reinforcement of populism and bad dogma. They are not comfortable with the idea of simple rule by the people. I agree with them somewhat but conservatives rarely see other factors, in particular the deep underlying problems such as unemployment, bad employment, corporate welfare, and harm to nature. Liberals see the root problem in wealth and power alone. I do not deny that wealth and power cause nasty problems but they need not. The trick is to harness wealth and power for good, not to suppress them or govern them too much.

It helps to see if we make a black-and-white before-and-after contrast between an ideal imaginary world versus the real world.

This imaginary world never existed but people think it did: Everybody who wants to work can find a job and can make enough to raise a family. The harder you work, or the more ability you have, the more you make. While there are socio-economic classes, anybody can move up, or down, through his-her own efforts and abilities. People depend on each other in the way that the baker depends on the farmer for wheat for flour but nobody deeply depends on anybody else in the way that a slave depends on a master or the way that working people depend on the factory owner in a town with one factory. If you are not happy with this job, you can find another job or you can go start a farm. Just because nobody depends on anybody else in a bad way, people are happy to interact and form a community voluntarily. Because people form a community voluntarily, community is strong. People help each other spontaneously and freely. The problems are mostly those that nature throws our way such as drought, flood, fire, some failed crops, some diseases, etc. Everybody can understand every problem. Not everybody can think of the best response to every problem. But, somebody always can think of the best response to a problem. The rest of the people can understand and weigh proposed solutions, and, eventually, accept the best solution and accept the leaders who offer the best solution. The best and brightest people are elected and-or appointed to public offices. The people in general can recognize the best and brightest among them and will send the best and brightest to public office. People do form groups, and sometimes people do compete as groups, but people can overcome group allegiance when they have to. People can see when group allegiance hurts the overall welfare of the nation, and will leave groups, or put down groups, when that happens. Everybody has as much education and knowledge as a citizen needs.

Into this ideal, inject some real facts:

-People are no longer fully independent. They need jobs, and they need good jobs. You cannot leave this job to go to another job at will. If you don't like working for an employer, you cannot start your own farm or your own firm. People feel dependent, constrained, and nervous.

-Real problems come up that have to do with the way things run, that are hard to understand, and hard to fix: the business cycle, unemployment, and bad employment. Some people cannot get work at all, or cannot get work that allows them to raise a family well. If you can't find a job, you starve. If you can't find a decent job, your children starve. If you can't get a good job, your children are doomed to bad schooling

and further bad jobs. If you have a degree, you are not guaranteed a job; but if you don't have a degree, you are guaranteed not to get a job. Getting a degree costs enormous amounts of money. Medical care costs enormous amounts of money. Some people cannot contribute to the community, and feel bad as a result.

-People feel community within groups but not across groups.

-To be at a disadvantage is to risk total failure.

-People fear.

-Some groups have to take the brunt of unemployment and poor employment but that result is tolerable as long as the majority have a job to cling to.

-People now see life as a "zero sum game" in which what one group gains another group loses, and vice versa. To lose is to suffer comparative disadvantage. To suffer comparative disadvantage is to fail entirely for yourself and your family. Groups insist on having a comparative advantage at all times.

-People cannot understand the proposed solutions to problems. They cannot see the best solution to a problem and cannot see when a problem might not have a best solution or might not have a solution at all.

-Schemes abound. People choose schemers to lead. Rich people and powerful people see all this, and develop a system to provide the people with supposed leaders with plausible schemes.

-The rich and powerful people make sure enough people are well-off enough so there is not too much general unrest. Hopefully the worst effects can be confined to a few ethnic or religious groups. The rich and powerful people do what they can to lead the state well but even they are not up to the task. Their first concern is the welfare of their own kind although they do still try to lead the state well when they can.

-People, and business firms, think, if they can forge an alliance with the state, then they can be secure enough not to suffer comparative disadvantage, to gain comparative advantage, and so succeed. They seek relations with the state in many ways. They seek to be clients of the state.

-The state offers "breaks" to groups of people to make them feel as if they will be able to get by. The breaks include farm subsidies, deducting mortgage interest payments from taxes, and loans to small business. The breaks include tax breaks for large firms and finance for research for large firms.

-People and firms depend on access to the state. They believe everybody else has more access to the state than they do, and are jealous. If they lose access to the state, or other groups get more access, they will be at a disadvantage, and so risk total failure. People carefully scrutinize access to the state. People compete as socio-economic classes, ethnic groups, religious groups, and gender groups to gain access to good positions and the state.

-Groups turn morality and fairness from good ideas into bad dogmas. Groups use appeals to morality and fairness to get more for themselves, make sure other groups do not get more, and even make sure other groups get less.

-Good ideas become bad dogmas of all kinds. Groups, including business, become adept at turning good ideas into bad dogma to use as tools.

-Groups learn to blackmail the system such as by appealing to the plight of children and immigrants. Groups learn “double speak” to reframe situations in ways beneficial to themselves such as by calling all business people “job creators” and by using “pro” as in “pro life” and “pro choice”.

-The rich and powerful, and the leaders, use group jealousy and group competition. They give some groups breaks, threaten to take breaks away from other groups, and play one group off against another.

-Rather than think through this, or think through any issue, people concentrate on not seeing reality and concentrate on getting as much from the state as they can. “Get mine first” prevails. Nobody can think straight.

This end situation sounds like something out of ancient Rome or the chronicles of any decadent empire. It develops when people depend on a system for a living and cannot make it on their own; some problems come from within the system; some problems are hard to think through and solve; people turn to schemes and schemers; and people seek security through being clients of the state. These conditions are more common than the ideal conditions that lead to a good democracy. If we want to have a real democracy in a real world then we need to think about how to run that kind of self-government in that kind of place. This we have not done so far.

Democracies are set up to deal more with the first ideal situation than with the second real situation. At least since 1973 and the failures of the world economic system, democracies have not had the citizens, institutions, ideas, and leaders to deal with the real world.

Individuals, families, ethnic groups, religious groups, and gender groups are not the only miscreants or even the chief miscreants. Business groups abuse the system at least as much as the ethnic groups and welfare recipients that they vilify. Business groups began the system of being clients to the state and are its chief supporters today. Conservatives and righties of all kinds usually overlook this fact.

Repeat: If these Values Fail, Why Support Them?

The classic values of Western Christianity gave us not ideal democracy but real democracy that does not work nearly well enough in the modern world. Again: why should we support these values?

Soon, other half-democratic systems will evolve, and, in many ways, those systems will support prosperity and limited freedom better than failed American democracy. While we might call other political systems “half-democracies”, in fact, they are variations on fascism. China, India, Russia, and Brazil are examples. Those nations as a whole will prosper enough. People there can do as they wish as long as their acts are not too political, mostly limited to business, and do not undermine the ruling class. The prosperity comes

of that limited freedom. The ruling class makes sure everything works together. Some bribery and other corruption is tolerated as long as it supports the ruling class and does not undermine general prosperity. Tainted goods threaten China's reputation on the world market. China executes factory owners and-or operators who produced tainted goods, and the officials that took bribes to allow them to produce tainted goods. Not all groups within these countries can be prosperous but the central political elite are happy to put down the rabble who don't have good enough jobs. The business elite are happy that the political elite does this for them. These political-economic systems borrow from European Christian values and American democracy but, really, deeper values underlie them and make them work their way, systems such as Confucianism or Hinduism.

Why don't we adopt this other pattern and the values that go along with it? Why don't we become half-democratic mostly fascist? Now, many people might prefer it. That outcome is more likely than that we will come to grips with the problems of European Christian democracy, fix them, and so advance. If I had to guess, I would say this is what we will do, and embrace it as "Americanism". We will re-interpret our old values to make it happen.

I hope we don't do that. We can still salvage self-government based on old European Christian values. It can work, and it can compete in the world arena. In the hope that we still do this, I still support traditional values.

Rather than say the values of Western Christianity lead inevitably to simplistic populist democracy that is not up to the modern world, it is better to say one version led to that. The values of Western Christianity can give us more than one version of self-government and democracy. They can give us versions of self-government that are not simplistic populist democracy but are responsible representational democracy. Whether that better version is up to the issues of the modern world, I don't know. But I would rather try that version than most alternatives.

Lessons from the Failure of Democracy and from Our Failure as Stewards of Nature.

Good citizenship is not a slogan, ideal, or joke. It makes a difference. We really do need good citizens. To have good citizens, we have to work at it.

We need to teach good citizenship. Not all people, ethnic groups, religions, classes, gender groups, etc. are automatically good citizens just because they were born, are oppressed, or had oppression removed. We have to learn how to teach good citizenship. Then we need to do it.

When people in religions, ethnic groups, gender groups, etc. want, they can learn to be good citizens.

When people in general, and the people in all kinds of groups, become good citizens, we should value them highly. We should learn to reach across normal group boundaries to find good citizens. We can learn from them too.

We should not be afraid to denigrate bad citizens. They cause harm. We should not be afraid to blame groups that will not learn good citizenship or that practice bad citizenship.

We should face reality, not just the scenes offered to us by our right wing beliefs or left wing beliefs.

No Plan of Salvation here.

I can think of suggestions to help although I cannot think of any way to make all this better for everybody gracefully. Getting better will take pain and will take changing from simplistic populist democracy to good representational democracy. Usually the plans of the major political parties, religious groups, and ethnic groups are not what we need and would not work. We have to choose what would work and what would go together. That is not likely to happen soon. Here is not the place to offer specific suggestions. I do that in other work.