05 Some Issues 2

The previous chapter looked at issues mostly for single ideas and individual people while this chapter looks at clusters of ideas and the impact on society. I use the term "system" without meaning anything good or bad, implying anything tight or closed, or recalling systems theory of the 1950s through 1970s. "System" is a handy catch-all term for any cluster that hangs together.

PART 1: Relativism, Social Issues, and Political Issues

Subjective and Universal.

All modern major religions were founded in the time from about 1000 BCE (BC) to 800 CE (AD). Except for Islam, all were founded in large agricultural states with a stratified society, strong priests, and a strong military. Islam began in militarized city-states (Mecca and Medina), then quickly moved to a hierarchical agricultural military state (Babylon, Iraq) with, in effect, a strong Muslim priesthood.

Most ideas are relative to situations. All modern religions originally were suited to an empire based on agriculture, not to life in the modern world of capitalism, plural democracies, and glitzy technology. The fact that ideas are relative to situations does not automatically make all religions wrong, bad, or irrelevant to conditions other than the ones in which they began. The fact that all major religions were founded in agricultural states with strong priesthoods does not automatically make them wrong, bad, or irrelevant to modern democracies. The fact that they were founded in conditions different than what we live in now does mean we have to assess their claims carefully. We too live in particular conditions that lead us to see the world, God, Dharma, people, souls, salvation, religion, and so forth, in particular ways. Even modern atheism is shaped by modern conditions. Relativity does not necessarily make us wrong either but it should lead us to be more careful of ideas from the past, more respectful of them, and to be more careful of our own ideas. All the major religions still have relevance if we look to what is relevant, ignore what is not relevant, and discard what is harmful.

The presence of any historical relativity, past or present, seems to knock all objectivity out from under us. If all points of view are shaped by particular temporary conditions, in the past or now, then how can we ever find an objective place from which to have a universal view? The simple answer is that we just can do that, at least well enough, if not perfectly. A slightly more sophisticated answer: even if we do not quickly achieve absolute objectivity, we get ever closer; and getting ever closer is good enough. We get close enough to support what we have to do in our times. Evolution gave us enough mental acuity to see well enough to get on with life now. Evolution gave us enough objectivity to do what we have to do. We make mistakes, but we get over them. We never see a berry or a deer absolutely perfectly objectively but we see them objectively enough so we can gather and hunt. We never see our spouses absolutely objectively but we still get on with relationships. We never solve religious questions perfectly but we solve them well enough to know what we should do.

All major religions claim to be universal and true. Even if they do not say so outright, they imply they are the one and only true best religion while other religions are false or inadequate. Even Hinduism, which says there are many paths to the same God, also says it has the one general framework within which that idea makes sense while other religions do not, so other religions are inadequate and partly false. Not all religions can be the one and only true best religion if they are not all deeply the same, and they are not all deeply the same.

We have to look for the core basic ideas of various religions, their basic stances, to see if those stances are wide enough. We compare religions. If no religion is universal, then we need to accept that fact as well. We assess religious ideas according to our criteria, especially the principles of morality. We assess religions according to the actual behavior of believers and the actual institutions they make.

Social Relevance.

Some religions have social concern built in, the most obvious of which is Christianity. Christians should take seriously Jesus' commands to help the poor, sick, hungry, sad, alienated, imprisoned, distressed, and oppressed. They believe, or should believe, that evil can be conquered only when social injustice is conquered too. Jews and Muslims recently have acted similarly. Even religions that do not emphasize social action have contributed to social justice in the modern world. Buddhist monks avoid politics but even Buddhist monks have worked against unjust regimes. Buddhists believe in minimizing suffering. In the last few decades, Buddhists in Thailand have tried to develop a rationale for social and ecological action based on minimizing suffering.

The modern world still has too much badness. The badness could be greatly alleviated through social justice, even if not eliminated. Yet the current problems of badness and social justice are not necessarily universal. Even if we solve these problems, new problems are likely to arise. A never-ending crusade to solve the evils of the present day is not necessarily the proper subject of supposedly-universal religions. Too often, governments do not seek to alleviate badness and injustice but use it to perpetuate their own power. Religions do not want to antagonize established power. If they do antagonize power, then they won't be able to help anybody.

Still, any religion that does not face current issues will seem irrelevant. People will not follow it (unless it gives them many other benefits, such as worldly success). Religions have to face the problems of today and the underlying causes, just as religions did before when they spread through meeting the needs of agricultural states. Religions now have not done a good job so far. That is one reason why they seem so hypocritical and why people don't follow them.

Contradictions of Capitalism.

All times have problems that shape them. Capitalism is the world economic system. Everybody already lives under it, or soon will. Nobody can make a living other than under capitalism. So, capitalism must provide wealth reasonably well, operate with a certain amount of social justice, sustain the planet, and be compatible with plural democracies. Surprisingly, capitalism actually does most of that most of the time. Sadly, it does not do it well enough, the gaps make a difference, and we refuse to deal with the problem. I focus on one gap.

Capitalism necessarily generates about 4% to 10% involuntary unemployment, even for people who have some skills and earnestly seek a job. Capitalism necessarily makes about 20% poor employment, where people do not make enough to buy benefits such as health care and retirement, and where they might not be able to raise a family. These issues are confounded because some people really are stupid, inept, will not learn a skill, have a bad attitude, or will not hold a job.

The flaws of capitalism lead to dependence on the state. The poor can prefer welfare to work. They can become a burden on the good will of others and on the system that was set up to help them. They have too many children. They have children young and unmarried. They develop a bad attitude toward education and toward being good citizens of a larger society. They do not care for their children in a way that helps their children get jobs and be useful. They teach their children their bad attitudes. They become trapped in a cycle. We mistakenly think economic growth will solve all problems, so we create as system of welfare for business firms. Business firms learn to take for granted money and help from the state, and learn to corrupt the political system so as to keep the tap flowing. Corporate welfare probably causes more harm than personal welfare.

The flaws and dependence create moral dilemmas. Helping can make things worse. On the one hand, we cannot deny help to children. On the other hand, if we help the children we enable bad parents. Bad parents prefer dependency, become experts at milking the system and at PC blackmail, have a bad attitude, and they teach their children. By helping we create bad people of the future and we ruin young lives. Yet if we cut off bad parents, we cut off their children too and we cut off other good parents who do need help. We are caught between helping innocent children versus enabling bad adults. We are caught in a similar trap between good business firms versus bad business firms, farmers versus consumers, and small business versus big business.

The comparatively small flaws of capitalism feed huge problems of bad development, hurting nature, racism, sexism, ageism, and discrimination by nationality and religion. The problems feed party politics and political irrationality. The problems prevent us from seeing the future clearly and preparing for the future. The problems shape how stances play out. For example, rebellion means one thing when carried out by bandits in 2000 BCE and means another thing when carried out by freedom fighters hiding in the hills. Romanticism distorts our understanding of all these problems.

Any religion has to come to grips with this situation of capitalism sooner or later. The specific solutions will be framed in terms of economics and politics but the insights behind the solutions likely will come from religion.

Politics and War.

Anybody who has not had this insight has not lived in the modern world: If we used all the resources that we spend on wars and preparation for wars, we could solve the problems that cause conflict in the first place. If the United States, Israel, and Muslim nations had used the money that they spend on conflict, they could have prepared all Muslims for an occupation and could have developed all Muslim nations, so there would be far less conflict, and there would be many people with a strong stake in peace opposing conflict instead of supporting it. Even if religion alone does not cause conflict, it has not done enough to

end conflict. Even if religion does not waste wealth, religion does little to make nations spend it wisely. Religion has not done enough to end the underlying causes. It is not enough for leaders to urge world peace on holidays or when celebrating an old victory of civil rights.

Standard Textbook Problems of Democracy.

-Not everybody is competent to be a citizen in a democracy. If too many people are not competent, the democracy must fail.

-People can be incompetent because general human nature is not good enough, particular individual abilities are not good enough, they were not prepared by school, or they are too lazy to stay abreast of current issues.

-Democracy has to allow free thought but it cannot allow groups that wish to destroy democracy, not even to establish a theocracy based on your favorite religion.

-The values of democracy ideally are neutral toward all religions and cultures yet the values of democracy came out of one particular religion and culture: Western Judeo-Christianity. It is not clear that the values can stand if we forget where they came from. Yet, if we extol the founding religion and culture too much, we automatically lose its key values of neutrality and freedom of thought.

-Not all cultures and religions are amenable to democracy. It is still an open question how amenable to democracy are Chinese, Indian, and African cultures, and fundamentalist religions of all kinds.

The Future.

The previous chapter mentioned the changes that will come from artificial intelligence and biotechnology. We cannot avoid these changes by banning birth control, bottle babies, or abortion, or by declaring that people are really angels in disguise and we shouldn't mess without our DNA. These changes will make obsolete current arguments about such issues as abortion, and they will force us to make up our minds about what is human, sentient, and valuable about life.

Sadly, democracy as we had hoped for in America already has failed. Some kind of democracy in name will linger on all over the world but it will be only a shabby ghost. World ecology has fallen so low that it cannot be repaired in the near future. We already have lost too much biodiversity. Medicine has given us great benefits but it also has allowed people to live who have genetic burdens and who do not take care of themselves, such as people with diabetes and obesity. It requires us to pay for them. Population will not stop growing until the Earth has about 10 billion people. More people in the future, all over the world, with few real ideas of democracy and good citizenship, all wanting more stuff and more convenience, can only make the problems worse.

The changes of biotechnology and artificial intelligence will combine with the degradation of nature and the state. We will have to define what is human and good in that context.

One Big Combined Contradiction; "I Can't Get No Satisfaction".

Without us really quite understanding how, all the contradictions of modern life seep into our hearts as one big contradiction. This one big contradiction creates a constant nibbling malaise that undermines other goods that we get in life. It makes us anxious and bored. We look for one big solution to everything even when we know it cannot be. We seek one religion or one ideology to master it all. We seek a giant ideology to comfort us but can't really find it. We try hard to get satisfaction in family life but even success in family life does not make the unease go away. People seek other ways to find satisfaction such as business, wealth, fame, power, and professional glory. That gets some people through their lives but most people feel it would not be enough even if they had it. Rich and powerful people turn to philanthropy not just to provide a cover but also to find some peace of mind.

Some people in all times have felt that life might not be worthwhile but only in our times has this malaise become a common theme in pop culture and high culture. Even before about 1800, people sang ballads about the comfort of death but not until after 1800 did angst dominate song as it has since.

At some time, religion has to address these issues, both individually and in their agglomerated unease. To do so, it has to find the source of the problem, and it has to find reasonable suggestions. Religion has not done this. My religious view based on Jesus, practicality, and the ideas of the West does not in itself do it all either but, at least, it lets me see the issues clearly and suggest some meaningful actions. Other religions seem not to do even that much.

Fake Rebellion and Justified Rebellion.

The attitudes described in this section show up in many ways throughout the book. At the risk of boring you, I repeat the ideas later in the book.

There really are problems, such as the contradictions of capitalism, injustice, degradation of nature, living off the state, using the state as an agent, racism, sexism, growing inequality of wealth, degradation of the middle class, the failure of democracy, etc. Since the 1970s, our leaders have not faced up to these problems. People feel that something is wrong, and that our leaders have failed us, even if they can't specify what, who, and how. People respond in various ways.

The proper response to the problems is to try to understand them, what works, what doesn't work, what to do in general, and what you can do personally. Even if our leaders do not seem to understand problems and will not address them, still we are obliged to think about them as well as we can and then to do what we can. We have to assess our particular abilities, think about what problems need the most work, what problems need what kind of work, and then apply our particular abilities where they will do the most good. We can take into account what kind of problems we like to work on or don't like to work on. Some people like to work with nature while some people like to work on social issues.

As long as problems remain, and leaders will not address the problems, then some rebellion is justified. "Rage, rage against the dying of the light". Even if you are not quite sure why you rebel, and against what you rebel, some rebellion is justified. Not much rebellion is justified, and most rebels are not justified. Justified rebels are not stereotypical rebels and they usually don't look and act like stereotypical rebels. Justified rebels work to understand and to get something done.

Few people, and few leaders, work to really see and get something done. Instead, people find an outlet that lets them feel good about themselves while doing not much. All times have uncertainty, and ours is no different. When faced with uncertainty, intractable problems, and bad leadership, people tend to fall into routines from which they can gain at least some satisfaction.

One such response is to act according to a code. I take up this response in a later chapter.

Many people flee into careerism, both of the job and, now, of idealized mommy-and-daddy family life. People pursue a job as career even when they don't have much feel for the content of the job and don't even like the job much; many academics are like this. It might seem surprising to think of mommy-and-daddy as a career after all the movies and TV shows about "parent versus job" and all the movies from the 1980s onwards about parenting as holy, but mommy-and-daddy are careers now because that is how we approach modern life.

Many people escape into a role, often roles defined by the media, such as sports fan, hip-hop fan, wannabe glamour girl, artist, religious person, modern guy, and modern woman.

Many people find a scapegoat, such as "Blacks", "White trash", "honkies", "Mexicans", "the gays", "the Christians", "Liberals", "gun nuts", etc.

Many people find a cause for which they can crusade, especially a cause that has some merit, such as saving nature, controlling abortion, promoting radical Islam, Black anger, or White power. People do not act in this cause primarily because of the merit, they have thought through the issues, or this is the best way for them to use their talents but because it makes them feel good about themselves.

Many people take on a semi-permanent attitude of rebellion. Most rebellion is not justified. It is primarily "acting out", a pose, and fake. Fake rebels think of themselves as fighting the Emperor or "the man". Fake rebellion seems justified because there are real problems, and it borrows justification from the need for real action. But fake rebellion is annoying and it adds to the harm. Fake rebellion is a version of finding a scapegoat, finding a cause to make yourself feel better, and taking on a role given by the media. Fake rebellion makes things worse because it undercuts real rebellion and real action to correct real problems. Fake rebellion blocks good thinking. Rather than hurt oppressors, fake rebellion helps oppressors because it gets in the way of seeing real problems and thinking hard about what to really do. Fake rebellion keeps victims under control by causing them to hurt themselves, hurt their own people, and hurt other groups.

We need to stop responding to problems in bad ways that only serve ourselves in the short term and that really make the problems worse. We need to respond in better ways. Clear thinking is the first step to better responding. Clear thinking is one of the best ways to help ourselves while we help others. Clear thinking is one of the best ways for underdogs to stop hurting themselves and to stop helping oppressors. Clear thinking about stances and religions can help us to do this. That is one reason for this book.

PART 2: More on Goodness.

It helps later to expand now on why the morality of Jesus seems naïve. The goal here is to reinforce the ideas that (1) I have to fall back on simple morality despite the fact that my idea of simple morality is not the whole story, and (2) we have to not reinforce badness. The points here are not the naïve charming points that young children make when disputing with parents, and the points are not the common ploy of moral relativity that adolescents usually raise. The points here are harder to deal with.

The goal here is not to convince everybody to be sweetly good. There is little danger of that. I want to avoid the opposite problem that often comes indirectly. When people find that some goodness is not as good as their parents said, or find that some vice is not as bad as their parents said, they dump good and embrace vice. They don't do this "whole hog", and often only play at being bad, so I am not worried about spawning a legion of minor demons. Rather, people spoil their ability to sort out good and bad, and so they do not make the best decisions they could, and often fall prey to bad ideologies and demagogues. Only later do people find out that good was good anyway and vice was bad anyway.

For example, when people find out that trusting can get you cheated, they quit trusting altogether. When people find out the first cigarette doesn't give you cancer, they get addicted to tobacco. When people find out that "pot" (marijuana) is fun and doesn't lead to heroin, they get a cocaine habit. When people find out that working hard to make the world better, and doing unto others as you would have them do to you, often gets you headaches, they turn selfish. When people find out that cheating, stealing, lying, taking, bullying, riding around in cars with boys or girls, and being a minor-league badass is fun, they "go that way" and can't get back. When people find out that politics and the economy don't work, and rebellion is fun, they become whining tools. All these people romanticize badness and then slowly turn into bastards and bitches.

I want to stop the glamorizing of badness by admitting right away that all goodness is not as sweet and successful as it's cracked up to be. I admit badness is fun, and that a lot goes on in the world besides goodness. Then we can see why we have to fall back on goodness in the long run anyway.

-People who set out to make the world a better place don't always do so. Often, they make things worse. Often, people who say they want to make the world a better place are meddling self-interested hypocrites who use morality as an excuse to manipulate other people.

-Often people who act for other reasons, even self-interest, do more to make the world a better place than people who work deliberately to make the world better. Henry Ford and Bill Gates did not set out to make the world a better place but they did.

-To oppose badness, we need tough people. We need moralistic people. Tough people are not always good. They do not always have a heart of gold. Sometimes tough people serve good but often they do not, and, even when they do serve good, they do not always aim to serve good. Often superficially good people get the credit for the hard work of tough people. Often the tough people who build a good world cannot live in the good world; they leave it for other people to inherit; it is an ongoing issue with soldiers "back from the war". Several movies of John Ford are built around this issue, including "The Searchers" and "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance".

-Much more is going on in the human world besides morality and religion, including science, politics, art, business, etc. We cannot limit interests only to what obviously right now makes the world a better place. If we did, we would make the world a worse place and a more boring place.

-Much more is going on in the world besides morality, science, politics, etc. There is a world beyond the realm of human action. There is also weather, meteors, solar radiation, chance, etc. How the world turns out depends on factors that are beyond the control of people who want to make the world better.

-Goodness and good people are often boring. Naughty people, and even some bad people, are often more fun, at least at first. It seems we need some mixture of naughtiness to have all the different kinds of fun in the world. If God wants us to enjoy the world, then God wants us to be naughty a lot of the time and even wants us to be bad some of the time.

-God is about more than the simple morality of "work hard to make the world better", "do unto others", and "applies equally". We can't get in touch with the fullness of God if we limit ourselves by this run-of-the-mill morality. We need to get beyond simple moral bounds to reach God. We need to learn to compromise and to mix morality with practicality. We need to learn to get on with things. This does not mean we have to be amoral or immoral, but we do have to see beyond simple morality.

-The world will not succeed as it should. "Work hard to make the world better" implies that everything will turn out tolerably well in the end. It implies that the contributions of hard workers make a big difference. Neither of these points is necessarily true. So "work hard", "do unto others", and "applies equally" don't always make sense in this world.

-Because God foresaw this world, "work hard" etc. don't always make sense in God's plan either, and God's vision must include more.

-If the world does succeed partly, and does not fail dismally, likely forces other than striving to make the world better will be important, even if striving to make the world better plays a role.

-Even if striving to make the world better does play an important role in helping the world, other forces also play a big role.

-If striving to make the world better is to play an important role in helping the world, it has to be mixed with a heavy dose of practical realism. It is easy to make a case that practical realism is more important than the ideal of working to make the world a better place. I am not sure which is more important when.

-God does not condemn to hell people who live normal lives and who do not work hard to make the world better. Likely those people only vanish after they die. In the meantime, they could enjoy the world. God also wishes us to do that.

-Many normal people do not have the temperament to work hard to make the world better, or even to become artists, politicians, scientists, business people, medical care providers, or other people who make the world better through their work. People farm, sell insurance, and run bars. To force these people through guilt to work hard to make the world better is to do evil. To force them makes the world a worse

place. It reduces the enjoyment of the world. Let people be who they are and do what they do as long as they do no harm.

-As long as you do no harm, it is better honestly to be what you are rather than force yourself to conform to a religious ideology. If conforming to an ideology perverts you, then God would rather have you as you are than pervert you into a false semblance of a saint. Trying to turn a dandelion into a rose is ridiculous, and a dandelion has value in its own right that we should not lose.

-It is hard to follow a religious idea without also falling into a perverting religious ideology. It is hard to work hard to make the world better while not perverting ourselves and others.

-Most people are pretty good. If they only follow their natural instincts, and take opportunities as they find opportunities, then they can do a lot to make the world a better place without having to follow an ideology.

-A great episode of the TV show "The Simpsons" condemned censorship even when censoring in the service of goodness and the greater good. Marge found that life was better all around if she did not let the family watch bad TV. Marge especially disliked "Itchy and Scratchy" and "Krusty". Marge had good taste. Marge found life was best if she turned off the TV entirely. So she did. Her idea caught on. People followed her not only in turning off the TV but in all questions of morality, proper behavior, and art. The whole town used her as the standard of right and wrong, of good taste and bad taste. As a result, children played in the sunshine and fresh air; families had dinner together; people loved nature; chores got done; people had more sex and love; and everybody was happier. To replace TV and bad art, Marge and the other good members of Springfield brought traveling art exhibits to town. One day, the statue of "David" by Michelangelo arrived. David's genitals are obvious. According to her proven successful benevolent standards, Marge should have covered David's genitals. But Marge is a painter. Marge could see this art was great, this work was beyond her simplistic standards, and people should have access to true full art even if it meant breaking her standards. She showed the statue. If this particular piece of art was greater than her standards, then she had no right to impose her standards. Other pieces also might be great, and she might not know it. She might deprive people of great art while shielding them from bad art. The loss is more than the gain. People have to be free to judge for themselves. Great art has to be free to enter minds even at the risk of bad art entering minds. Having good taste means being able to understand that we personally are not the final arbiters of taste, art, or morality; if we think we are, then we don't have good taste. The best we can do is to explain good art, explain good behavior, and then urge people to choose good over. Marge stopped censoring entirely. She let kids turn the TV back on. Life in Springfield town fell down. Instead of playing, children watched drivel on TV. Family members ate in isolation. Nobody talked to anybody else, got any exercise, did any chores, or took care of nature.

-Half-truths can do more damage than lies. We need to think hard about what is true and false, and try to take the true while overcoming the false. Sometimes in doing this we make mistakes. That is alright as long as we can recover. We might need some help to recover.

-Here is an example of a half-truth that we need to think about: To appreciate a good ideology such as the teachings of Jesus, sometimes you have to transgress the ideology. To appreciate beauty, you have to see ugliness. To appreciate morality, sometimes you have to sin, or at least you have to see sin up close.

-Here is another example: Breaking rules makes us free. It makes us free in ways that can't be imagined by people who never break rules and who live by a moral ideology all their lives. God wants us to be free. He made us with free will. To achieve great freedom is more important than to achieve great morality. We should not let Jesus' teachings stand in the way of freedom, the freedom that God intended. We should break rules to achieve freedom, and then we should live free.

-The real hero of the great science fiction movie "Blade Runner" is Roy Blatty (Rutger Hauer), the leader of the artificial humans, the "replicants" or "blades". I do not explain the plot. In confronting his human maker, Roy confesses that he has done "questionable things". That is putting it mildly. He is an attack soldier; a mass murderer of innocent people; he cares mostly for himself; and he will sacrifice others of his kind, other artificial humans, to get what he wants. Roy's maker points out that, despite doing some "questionable things", Roy also has done great things, and the maker says "the candle that burns twice as brightly burns half as long". Then Roy kills his maker. Before Roy dies, Roy teaches Decker, Harrison Ford, to love every moment of life, teaches Ford what fear is, what slavery is, to overcome fear, not to be a slave, to fight for life, and fight for people we love – he teaches Decker how to make the world better. Sometimes we need to just act without worrying if we do good or bad. Sometimes we need to be selfish. Sometimes amazing things come when we don't worry about good or bad but instead just do. This is like the amoral mechanical universe giving rise to life, and like automatic natural selection giving rise to beings who are intelligent and who can see beauty and morality.

I cannot go into long agonized evaluations of how true all this is. I am trying to get you to act the way people do after they have gone through naughtiness and badness, have come out on the other side, and now want something better. I am trying to get you to act as people do after they have taken all the drugs, real and metaphorical, have come through to the other side, and now want better. Before you embrace petty badness and disdain goodness, think how you would like the people around you to act. If you want them to act that way, why don't you have to act that way? The other people wonder the same about you and they question the motives of people around them including you. How long before you get bored with naughtiness too? If you have children, think about how you act around them, how you want them to act, and how you want people around them to act. How do you find a balance of goodness, independence, rule-following, rule-breaking, naughtiness, and badness for children? How do you prepare children for the real world? You do not let them indulge naughtiness and cheap thrills no matter how you glamorized naughtiness and cheap thrills when you were an adolescent. You do not protect them entirely from the world. You let them get real does of a real world even if they get hurt sometimes. At the same time, you try to keep them from getting lost. They have to learn to make their own way without becoming bad. A lot of the thrill of being naughty lies in our imagination. Without imagination, we could not appreciate Michelangelo's "David", so, yes, to appreciate art and life we have to appreciate naughtiness and have to be bored with goodness sometimes. Yet our imaginations lead us astray if we indulge them. Nobody is ever successfully naughty enough not to be bored too. For an imaginative view of going through badness to (overly sweet) goodness, see the movie "Groundhog Day" with Bill Murray and Andie McDowell, which I describe in the chapter on Hinduism.

The Victory of Good Solely Because It is Good.

This section anticipates a section in the later chapter on common themes in major religions. This section prepares the way below for more consideration of order, disorder, and myth.

Most people want good to defeat bad just because it is good. We don't want good to win because it is bigger or stronger, and we don't want good to win mostly because the bigger, stronger, more clever people are on the side of good.

If good wins because it is stronger, then good has not won, bigger and stronger has won. If bigger and stronger can win in this case, then bigger and stronger can win when they side with bad. It seems bigger, stronger, and cunning are on the side of bad more often than on the side of good. If bigger, stronger, and cunning decide the contest, then bad is far more likely to win than good. To make sure good wins, good has to win not because it is big, strong, or cunning. In fact, good has to be able to defeat big, strong, and cunning without being big, strong, or cunning.

More than that practical argument, though, people want good to win because it is good regardless of bigger or stronger and not against bigger, stronger, and more cunning. There is just something in good that we want to win out only because it is good and regardless of other considerations. I do not here go after what it is about goodness that makes us feel this way about goodness. Please think about it and try to feel it. In the same way, we want bad to lose because it is bad and not through any temporary loss of power and advantage.

Our desire that good win just because it is good shows up in stories that we tell about good and how it wins. We want sweet young innocents as main characters, and for them to win against corruption, vice, and evil. We don't want tough guys to do it all for the sweet young innocents. We want bad to do badly. Think of "Vanity Fair", "Lord of the Rings", or almost any Dickens writing even though Dickens is full of bad powerful strong big cunning people who win often – but not in the end.

People are not stupid either. They know that bad usually is bigger, stronger, and more cunning, and that those traits almost always win. So people allow that goodness can borrow from mostly-good but flawed people who are also big and strong, if not so cunning. We allow that good have its champions. We ask big strong people to protect goodness, including weak young innocent people. We know that the mix of goodness with experience and toughness is more likely to win, and so seek that. This idea is prominent in a movie that I mention many times: "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance".

(Accident also plays a part in the victory of goodness, especially if we hold that it is not really accident but is really evidence for modest well-timed intervention by higher powers. To quote Gibbs from "NCIS", "I don't believe in coincidence". Frodo did not win over the Ring, and neither did Gollum; instead, accident won when Gollum fell over the cliff into the fire. I do not go into the role of accident.)

There is another way that good or bad can win besides intrinsic virtue or power. Good or bad can win as a result of a prevailing system. The system itself need be neither bad nor good although we think of a system in which good wins often as good and a system in which bad wins often as bad.

When good wins as a result of the system, we can take that as a victory of goodness itself and not as a result of power, bigness, or strength. We can take it as an overall victory for goodness. We can feel

comforted that good really does win because it is good. (When good wins as a result of the system, I think that cunning has won more than good in itself. I do not stress this point here.)

Of course, we have to set up, nurture, correct, sustain, and improve good systems, or else we risk letting good fail and bad win; but that is another issue that I don't go into in this section.

When the system is a good system, when it runs better than alternatives, and we take an active a part in the system, we can accept the goodness that comes out of the system, and we can even see that result as a win for goodness in itself. In real life, few systems run so well that we should allow ourselves to see them as the instrument by which goodness wins because it is good, but we do it anyway.

Some Bad Hypocrisy along the Way.

When we think good wins due to the system, then we let ourselves "off the hook". We give ourselves an excuse. If we participate in a good system, that is good enough for us. We don't also have to work hard for good. Instead, we just do what makes us feel good, hope that contributes to the system, and hope that contributes to the victory of good because it is good. We can thank God for his foresight and for letting us be born in a world where good really does win just because it is good. This is how most people think about idealized capitalism and idealized democracy, and what they do as a result.

Sadly, since 1950, and especially after 1980, this is how people think of membership in an ethnic, gender, religious, regional, political, or age group, or a church. Our group is good, it is the best chance for a victory of goodness over badness, and all I need to do participate in the victory of goodness is to be a righteous member of my group.

This attitude is an excuse to do what you want, congratulate yourself through congratulating the system, and not worry about good, bad, order, hard work, power, strength, big, or cunning. Democracy works; all the smart people say democracy is the best political system, I vote for my guy; and that is all I have to do to help goodness win; so now I am free to indulge in opinions and bad group politics. Capitalism works; all the business people so say; I have a good job; that is all I have to do to help goodness win; so now I can buy a big house and a trophy spouse with whom to have trophy kids. I belong to the heaviest gang; we take care of business; we protect the neighborhood; I am a stand-up guy in the gang; and that is all I have to do to make goodness, my kind of goodness, win. I belong to the right ethnic, gender, religious, and etc. group; we are wronged because we are in that group; being wronged makes us right; making us right is a victory of goodness; so all I have to do is be a stand-up member of my group. This attitude is not a win for good just because it is good, through a system or otherwise. This is a victory for badness through cunning.

Good for the Sake of Good versus A Selfless Act.

A common theme in books, movies, and TV shows is the plight of a "sort of" hero (including women) who is almost but not quite good enough to go to heaven, and can go if he-she can get beyond him-herself and can do one big completely selfless act. The act cannot be done for the sake of going to heaven. It has to be done when the hero has given up all hope of heaven and does it for the sake of the recipient. This theme underlies the movie "It's a Wonderful Life" and the TV show "The Good Place". A variation on

this theme is when a man (almost always a man) loves a woman so much that he sees he is not good enough for her and so decides to let her alone to find a truly worthy man or he even decides to help her find a truly worthy man – of course, that is when she comes to love him truly. This version is a big theme on the TV show "Lucifer" and in many "chick flick" movies and TV shows. Doing a big selfless act is much like Jesus' admonition(s) to love our neighbor as ourselves and love even our enemies.

If you do good for good's sake, then, eventually, you will have to do something good that is contrary in a big way to your own worldly self-interest. You might have to do a big selfless act. You will face this test not once but many times. Each time, you will redefine yourself. So, the two ideas do overlap somewhat. Yet, most of the time, doing good coincides with our self-interest, or doing good helps the people that we love and the people around us so much, and hurts our self-interest so little, that there is no real contest. What friend-of-the-family has not gone to a match, recital, or play by the children of the other family, or waded through countless online images? So, the two ideas are not exactly the same.

There is not much point here in arguing the merits of either idea. I go into that topic briefly elsewhere.

I prefer to think of doing good for its own sake. I prefer to think that way because goodness does often coincide with self interest and with the obvious interest of many others. People who do good for its own sake can practice in those arenas before they face harder arenas such as a big selfless act. People who think of doing the big selfless act often freeze and can't do any good in any arenas. People can't get over the idea of doing good not for the sake of good but to go to heaven. Thinking of heaven and salvation actually does more harm than good. When people try to do good for the sake of good rather than for any reward, eventually, they often do learn how to be selfless in small ways that eventually add up to a lot of selflessness and that sometimes prepares them for something big. I would rather have that outcome than people striving for a giant act of total self-denial.

It is wrong, misleading, and causes more harm than good to define good in terms of against-the-self. There is much good in the world that is not against my self or any other self. We are not always against each other. If you take as the mark of goodness and morality that it is (they are) contrary to self-interest, then you badly distort the world and hurt the world. The idea is fine for drama and it is quite beneficial to think about the cases where they do conflict but it is also beneficial to think about the cases where they do not conflict. You can be a hero just by being useful. People and God will love you if you are only useful and do not save the world through self denial.

If you want to think in terms of overcoming the self then go ahead. If you think in terms of overcoming the self so as to get to heaven, likely you will never get out of the trap.

PART 3: How to Eat the World.

This part warns against falling for doctrines, even the beautiful well-rounded theologies of major religions, and even beautiful adventure stories. Goodness win by idealized capitalism and idealized democracy also are examples of such doctrines. Enjoy the beauty but stick to simple ideas on which you can base useful action. If you have the temper for theology, myth, or argument, then go ahead; but do not expect that you have proven anything and do not expect other people to follow you. Do not get lost in your own imagination. Do use your imagination.

Idea Systems that Eat the World.

Most ideas are limited in scope, and, for most ideas, we can figure out if they are workably true or false, even if we do argue a bit: "The traffic lights on the Parkway should be reset to go along with the speed limits". "Global climate change is real, and it is mostly caused by people". These are fairly clear, usually are not dangerous, and are not the subject of this chapter.

The major idea systems of the world since about 1000 BCE (BC), including the major religions, and, until recently including Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism, are not like this. Pop culture "big trends", such as being hip, cool, or a "gangsta", are like this. They want more. They try to explain everything. They are aggressive in attempts to explain. I say they try to "eat the world". They are not clear, are dangerous, and are the subject of this part of the chapter. I warn against them. To help us not fall into their traps, I explain a bit how they work.

Science does try to explain as much as it can. Still, in its best practice, it is not a system that tries to eat the world. Science accepts that it makes mistakes, and it provides ways to show mistakes and correct mistakes. In its everyday practice, science can be like a system that eats the world but usually is more helpful than harmful. This book is not about science and the scientific stance, so I don't explain more about science in these terms or contrast science with other big systems of explanation.

Rigging the Evidence.

Systems that eat the world are like cults. Even when a system that eats the world is a beautiful religion such as Christianity or Buddhism, it is still like a cult. Once inside, it is hard to get out. You begin to think in terms of the system. Soon enough, you can't think outside the system. You evaluate other views in terms of the system, and reject other views. Once you begin to think in terms of White Power or Black "gangsta", you act that way, and you reject other ways such as reason. Once you begin to think in terms of social misfit, you act that way, and you reject other ways such as compassion. Once you begin to think like an academic careerist, you look at the whole world that way. Once you begin to think in terms of a major religion, you act that way, and you reject other religious views.

Cults, and major religions, are able to do this because they rig the evidence.

Systems that eat the world give a set of categories by which to view the world, such as soul, self, cause-and-effect, Dharma, original sin, justification, salvation, "nigger", "Whitey", "Chink", grant proposal, donor, publication, and review. Everything important in the world has to fall into these categories. You cannot use any ideas that do not fall in these categories. You must use some of these categories to explain life. In some forms of Christianity, all good comes from God and only from God; humans cannot originate any good or do any good on their own; all bad comes only from demons or from humans. So, if you want to do good, you have to give up normal ideas of being a human and accept ideas about God as given in those forms of Christianity. In communism, much the same was true of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, or Mao versus ordinary humans.

(Using categories can be very useful and usually is more good than bad; but that is not the issue here. Here we see how using categories can harm us.)

The categories reinforce each other. In Christianity, you have to be justified to be saved and only Jesus now can justify you. In Buddhism, the goal is to stop suffering; to stop suffering, you must accept the insights of the Buddha; and one of the insights of the Buddha is that the goal is to stop suffering. In Islam, one of the necessary beliefs is that Mohammad is the most important prophet of God; and we know this because Mohammad, the most important prophet of God, told us.

The system uses contradictions to keep you within the system. Christians need both faith and works, and have never worked out the relation between them except through the intervention of God's grace; yet if we are only saved by God's grace, then why do we need faith or works? We just do, and that is what we have to live with. In Buddhism, clinging leads to suffering, and so we should desire release; but to desire release is a form of clinging.

In particular, the ideas and issues of other systems are reduced to the ideas and issues of this system. They are trivialized or made bad. The gods of other religions are really demons out to fool us.

If necessary, the ideas of other systems, and any annoying empirical (factual, sensual) evidence, are simply suppressed. George Orwell used this ability to crunch truth terrifyingly in his book "1984" where "freedom is slavery". Captain Picard from "Star Trek TNG" fought against it when, even after torture, he would not say that four lights were five lights: "there are four lights". Mostly the effect happens at milder but more pervasive levels as when advertisers convince us that their clothes make us look thinner, and we are not really fat, despite the obvious rolling bulges.

Systems that eat the world are like "self-fulfilling prophecies". For example, people treat Asian kids as smart; teachers see them as smart; thus they get good grades; their good grades prove they are smart and prove we were right to treat them as smart all along. People treat Black of Hispanic kids as hard to teach; so they get bad grades; their bad grades prove they are hard to teach and prove we were right to treat them that way all along. Black and Hispanic kids believe about themselves that they will not learn anything useful; so they don't really try; they act badly; so they are hard to teach. A powerful leader fears a young hero (boy or girl) will arise, and kills all the children in a village to stop it. The young hero lives miraculously, and the massacre leads the young hero to assume leadership and thus to defeat the tyrant. What the tyrant did to stop his-her downfall leads to his-her downfall. Jews think of Pharaoh trying to kill Moses; Christians have Herod trying to kill Jesus; Muslims have the clans of Mecca trying to kill Mohammad; and pop culture fans have Beast Master, Red Sonja, and Luke Skywalker.

Systems that eat the world seem to explain everything. They seem to explain a lot and they don't worry about what they can't explain. They are like con artists trying to sell you land on the sunny shores of Bangladesh. They are like a Ponzi scheme where they give you a big return on your investment right away so you put even more money into the scheme and never question it again. There is nothing more important than a career in academics if your name goes down in history and your work as an academic helps solve world problems. Christianity and Islam, using the Fall, original sin, human depravity, God's Will, rebellion against God, pseudo free choice, works, faith, and grace, explain everything that they want to know about human behavior and society. Using "in accord with the Tao" and "not in accord with the

Tao", Taoists do the trick with simplicity. Using Dharma and karma, Buddhists and Hindus explain who we are, how we got here, where we are going, and what we need to do. Using "cool" and "uncool" or "gangsta" and "wimp" modern pop con artists do the same.

When a person converts to a system that eats the world, sometimes the priests of the system have to use hard methods such as torture, brainwashing, blackmail, sleep deprivation, sessions, and peer pressure. But usually they don't have to get nearly that hard. People internalize they system just as in Stockholm Syndrome and as when young people who are kidnapped eventually come to stay with their captors and do voluntarily what originally they were forced to do. People go along with major religions because they come to really believe and because they fear the void in case their religion is wrong. People do the same with careers in a particular business firm or university.

It takes a lot of practice and hard work to get out of systems that eat the world if we have been raised in them or have fallen into them. Who could bear the thought of not being cool or a "gangsta"? But it can be done and should be done.

Explain a Lot but not Everything Yet.

Explaining a lot is not necessarily a bad thing. We want a system that explains a lot. Science aims to explain everything – on one level from one point of view – and I admire science. Buddhist psychology explains a lot of how the human mind works, and its insights go along with evolutionary psychology. We learn a lot about people when we think about free will and what happens when we corrupt ourselves through bad acts. We want rocket scientists who can tell us exactly where the rocket comes down. We want biologists who can tell us which genes cause cancer, which genes we can put up with in modified organisms, and which genes we have to fear.

Still, there is a difference between systems that are good at explaining versus systems that eat the world by explaining everything. We feel that systems out to explain everything are wrong and the motives of the practitioners are bad. I don't here try to untangle this issue. I only point it out so that you do not reject all good systems that explain a lot just because you fear slimy systems that eat the world. You have to learn to cultivate judgment through practice.

From Worse to Better, Hopefully.

Usually we can get out of one system only if we have a clear sense that another system is better, and that we can get there (new system) from here (old system) fast enough so we don't fall apart on the way.

If my advice about Jesus and working hard to make the world better helps people leave bad stances to get to good stances, then I have used reassurance in a good way. This book is partly about getting you to a system that I think is the best among available options; that is not a bad goal even if it is carried out in the context of a system.

Most people live their lives without committing "whole hog" to any particular system that eats the world, although they have to make their peace with the systems that prevail around them. Most people do not

become zealots or fundamentalists except during hard times or when converting. Normal lax Christians have to make peace with rigorous Puritans if they happen to live in a Calvinist region.

If your only option is a bad system, as in Stalinist Russia or Maoist China, then it is better that you don't commit deeply. It is better that people "skate" within a bad system trying to retain as much of their deeper humanity as they can.

Although people can live without committing "whole hog" to a system and becoming a zealot, people do not usually live without any system at all. Our minds don't work that way. We need categories even if the categories are not totally accurate. We also need to organize our categories into a system. We are more at ease and live better if we follow a framework that has worked well in the past for other people who are mostly like us.

On the whole, it is better to commit to a good system than to float aimlessly without a system. The better the system is most of the time, the better that we commit to it. If we follow Jesus, the Buddha, or the Tao, and we act better as a result, that is good. The later chapter on codes is about this issue of committing to something.

The trick is to avoid mistakes, avoid bad systems, find good ideas and acts, and find good systems. We don't have to fall "whole hog" into a better system even after we find it but we should be willing to accept a better system and we should go along with it as much as we can without violating deep principles.

I think people don't usually fall "whole hog" into a cult or religion, yet people do better if they live mostly within the context of a system, because of our evolutionary history. To commit whole hog to a system is to give up too much control to other people. Usually big-giving-up led people to less evolutionary success (fewer descendants) than if people retained more control. Usually when we give up a lot of control of our lives to other people, they use it for their benefit more than our benefit. Then, even if we do benefit some, we do not benefit as much as they, and so we suffer a net comparative loss. Giving up a lot of control to other people only worked in dire straights such as feuding. Natural selection would have favored people who could step back a little most of the time and opt out when necessary.

Natural selection also would have favored people who did accept some system from other people even if they did not go "whole hog". It takes a lot of trouble to reinvent the wheel, and it is better if we accept ideas from other people as long as those ideas do not open us up to control too much. Ideas work better if they are organized, that is, if they fall into a system. So, in accepting tradition and other people's ideas, we also accept their system somewhat, including their ideas about gods, spirits, kin, neighbors, enemies, and what is important in life.

Natural selection favored people who could accept a system somewhat but not entirely, and use it well. Most people are like that now. Natural selection favored people who could keep a balance of acceptance and rejection, other people's ideas and their ideas, ideas within a system and deep principles that seem to transcend system. That is what I am trying to help people do.

Deep Principles by Which to Judge Systems.

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Systems that eat the world provide the standards by which to judge everything. You cannot get outside them to judge them. Yet I advise people to step outside, use deep principles by which to judge systems that eat the world, not allow systems to suck you in and eat you up, not trust systems that eat the world, and go from a worse system to a better system. Where do we get principles outside systems by which to judge systems? And how do we apply principles if systems that eat the world if we are in such a system, as likely we are?

There are no good answers. The simple answer is that we just can much of the time. We can't always do it, and some people suffer greatly from being trapped. But, just as most people live most of their lives not sucked deeply into a bad system, so most people can step outside enough to get a better view and apply good principles.

Just as evolution gave us both the propensity to accept systems and the ability to step outside systems, evolution gave us some good principles almost regardless of system and gave us the ability to apply principles almost regardless of system. The Golden Rule does not really belong to a particular system even though Jesus stated it well and it is important in his teachings and life. We got an idea of the Golden Rule from our evolutionary history. We can use the Golden Rule to step outside of systems and assess systems. We might even find that some systems hold up well.

Since at least late Victorian times with heroes such as Sherlock Holmes, literature has been filled with examples of people who were able to step out of the system, see something better, do something better, become something better, and make the world better. They do this without necessarily going from one system to another but by relying on deep principles such as compassion, the Golden Rule, and reason. Since 1945, thousands of movies and TV episodes have cheered us on to jump out of a system trap to something better, usually for men to stop being careerists and to start loving their families. Jesus, the Buddha, Chuang Tzu, Mohammad, and other religious heroes encouraged people to do this, although, of course, they also encouraged people to dive into the systems they had built. I am not only jumping on a cultural bandwagon when I think people can do this and I encourage people to do this. I think this recent cultural bandwagon points out both a problem of our times – people cling to bad systems even when they don't work, and do bad things in the name of bad systems such as fundamentalism – and that people can stop supporting a bad system if they want, can step out, and can step up to something better based on deep principles.

I hope this book helps you to find deep principles, feel comfortable with deep principles, and assess the religions and thought systems around you on the basis of deep principles.

Some Useful and Not too Complicated Examples.

Modern economics is an example of a thought system that eats the world but that is not overtly religious or metaphysical. In official modern economics, people act only out of self-interest, everything they do serves their self-interest, they never do anything that does not serve their self-interest, and they know the best ways to achieve their self-interest. They are "rational". In terms more familiar to non-economists, a person always acts to get the most satisfaction that he-she can from all situations, and that is all a person ever does. If a person watches a building burn without trying to rescue the people inside, that inaction serves his-her self-interest because he-she rationally calculates the great risk, and rationally calculates

that he-she does not get enough satisfaction from saving others to override the loss of satisfaction that comes from getting burned. If another person rushes in to rescue kittens from the same burning building, that person gets does get more satisfaction that way than holding back. In this circular way, economics can explain everything that people do in terms of self-interest. Economics can get away with this ploy by saying that people are just differ subjectively in their tastes even if they are the same in wishing to get the most satisfaction. Some people like apples while other people like oranges, and some people like kittens while other people like to torture kittens. Yet everybody acts to get the most satisfaction. In fact, people do act mostly for self-interest even though the idea that they do it has some logical faults and sometimes is not factually true. I do not explain here how to deal with this problem or explain what is good and bad about economics.

The idea that people differ subjectively is a "hole" in the center of the system of ideas of economics. This hole in the center of systems that eat the world is important, all of them have some kind of such hole, and we will see it again later in systems that are built from mystic visions. The hole in the middle of a thought system makes it hard to test the system and makes the system impervious to evidence.

Another example of a system that eats the world that is not overtly religious or metaphysical is "depth" psychology in which psychologists (or psychiatrists) explain in terms of id, ego, superego, life impulse, death wish, sex, anger, fulfillment, childhood experiences, etc.

Examples of thought systems that eat the world and that include a strong component of religion and-or metaphysics include major religions, political correctness, all zealotry, nature worship and working to serve nature, market worship, power worship, art worship, fashion worship ("The Devil Wears Prada"), fascination with demons, seeing the Devil behind all evil, cosmic awareness, and all kinds of conspiracy theories whether there is a real conspiracy or not (see the movies "Conspiracy Theory" and "Enemy of the State").

A traditional thought system that eats the world, and is important in religion and metaphysics, comes from Plato and Socrates. People always do what is good. People only do what is good. People never do what is bad. People only do bad things because they do not have complete knowledge or they believe something false. If people fully understand themselves and their situations, they always do what is right. If a person ever does anything wrong, that person acted on the basis of incomplete or wrong information. All people are always capable of seeing the truth once it is presented to them, and all people are always capable of seeing the link between the truth and acting well. Nobody is too stupid. Nobody is too clever. Teachers and politicians are responsible for making sure that people have enough knowledge to act well enough to make sure that they do their duty as citizens and that the state runs well. I do not explain how this view has shaped Western political, moral, and psychological ideas and our ideas about knowledge.

If a person has a chance to steal a lot of money and to get away cleanly but does not steal, that person did not steal because that person rightly knew the importance of morality. If a person has a chance to steal and does steal, that person did not rightly know the importance of morality. Morality can always defeat selfishness, greed, power, lust, laziness, etc. when people deeply understand. This is the same kind of circular subjectivity we find in economics.

(Plato confounds this argument with arguments that moral action is also good for us and good for the state, both practically and in hazy ideas of goodness. I do not go into the problems here.)

When I first studied ecology, I was amazed at the attitude that prevailed then, and still often prevails now. I could understand the good motives behind the attitude but the attitude was plainly false, and people should have been more willing to update their attitude to accord with reality. Everything in nature was part of a system. All systems were closed. All systems supported themselves and perpetuated themselves. Every animal and plant played a part in the survival and reproduction of its species. Every species played a role in the survival and perpetuation on the ecosystem. We could completely understand every species by the role that it played in the ecosystem. We could completely understand every animal and plant by the part it played in service to its species. Ecosystems were divided into "trophic levels of production" beginning with plants and microcellular beings that directly converted energy from the sun, through herbivores, carnivores, and ending in top carnivores. The upper levels controlled the lower levels, something like the idealized class system in Feudal Europe or modern capitalism. Every plant or animal provided food for some specific other plants-or-animals or limited some specific other plants-or-animals. For example, herbs, deer, and wolves danced together so that each limited and yet also encouraged the others. Every noxious pest and disease played some role by limiting or encouraging species, including mosquitoes, malaria, flesh-eating bacteria, HIV, cancer, tapeworms, and poisonous mold on peanuts and in houses. The fit of a particular organism or of a species was its "adaptation". All particular organisms and species were well adapted no matter how they varied. If you did not have allergies, you were well adapted; if you did have allergies, you were well adapted. Brown, grey, and white bears were well-adapted. Biologists and anthropologists could find rationalizations for how any particular individual creature or any species was well adapted, and how any feature was part of an adaptation.

This thinking has much truth but is not entirely true. The ways in which it is not true cause real problems and leave open important questions. There are adapted features such as the color of a bear or the mane of a male lion but the features are not always for the good of the species or the ecosystem. The course of biology since about 1970 started as a reaction against this thinking. Individual organisms seek their own reproduction. In seeking, they act and interact in ways that lead to somewhat stable systems but not to the ideal "everything has a place" kind of system. For example, lions have prides in which female lions, usually sisters, cooperate to hunt and to raise cubs; that looks like a system of "everything has its place". Yet male lions kill all the cubs in a pride when they take over the pride from the old male. This act cannot be explained by how it serves the pride, species, or ecosystem but only by how it serves a particular male even at the expense of the pride, species, and ecosystem. People who think nature is all one glorious self-perpetuating romp build their big houses in the forest, clearing patch after patch, thinking all will be well because they are now part of holy systematic nature, and, by building there, cause large fires and mud slides. People build houses right on the beach thinking storms will not strike them because they are now part of nature. When we see nature as one glorious self-perpetuating romp we cannot assess how various farming practices affect nature. We can only take care of nature by accepting that it is not one glorious self-supporting system.

These systems can have their charm. In the European Middle Ages, ideally, everybody had a place and all places were part of God's sacred society. All productive activities were part of God's plan, and priests could find an explanation for all productive activities. Even warriors and priests were part of productive

activities. People had a reason to live. If you were willing to find a place in the social world, you could find a reason to live.

Despite the charm, the world of the European Middle Ages was stagnant. Only by shaking up Feudalism could capitalism arise with all its benefits. Now that modern capitalism has arisen, it has formed a new quasi-system, and the people that benefit from the new quasi-system see it in the same way that lords in the Middle Ages saw their quasi-system, as something with places for everyone and in which everyone can find a place as long as he-she does what benefits the system and its rulers. People who benefit from capitalism now think of its roles as sacred, and can rationalize every role that they want. "Job creators" are not simply business people out to make a buck but holy agents of God. "House flippers" used to be creative sacred innovators who moved goods (houses) to people who wanted them until the market crashed. The same was true of mortgage dealers. Speculators in petroleum products are sacred agents who stabilize the price system for all of us even if speculators sometimes drive up the price and even if they benefit greatly themselves.

The Worst Effect: Lack of Judgment about Ideas.

The worst aspect of thought systems that eat the world is that they make it hard to draw the line between a true useful idea and a bad harmful idea. Even good useful ideas can become bad hurtful ideas when they become part of a system that eats the world. It is true that people act largely out of self-interest but when we make a system that eats the world out of the idea that people act only out of self-interest, and never for any other reasons, then we undermine the idea that people often act out of self-interest. This is what happens in the market-worship version of (neoclassical) economics and in modern evolutionary theory. We see a few cases when people do not act out of self-interest, and we grow suspicious of the whole true idea. We don't know how to draw the line between selfish, self-interested, and altruistic; and we can't tell when it is important and not important to draw the line. People who have not had much of a moral education do act worse than people who have. A clear idea of morality can override selfishness, greed, lust, power, etc. much of the time. When we see situations clearly so that the moral component stands out, we are, in fact, more likely to act morally. So the idea from Plato and Socrates is largely true and it is important in making a good society. But it is not always true. Sometimes people see quite clearly but still succumb to lust, power, etc. This is a point that Paul made in his letters, and it tormented him greatly. It is an important point in modern society, and an underlying argument in the "culture wars" between the Left and Right.

(1) The Mediator at the Center.

This section and the next explain in some more detail just how systems that eat the world do it. They do not explain everything. If you wish, you can skip them for now, but the ideas will be useful later when assessing major world religions, in particular Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism. The two major themes, the mediator and the hole in the middle, go together, strongly imply each other, and likely could not keep up without support from each other; but it is useful to treat them separately. I repeat these ideas at other places in the book in case you don't recall them from here.

My comments here do not apply to religious systems other than those that originated in states based on agriculture such as Israel, India, and China, to their successor religions in similar states, such as Islam,

and to their modern forms in industrial and post-industrial states such as Christianity in the United States. There are divine mediators in religions found among hunter-gatherer-foragers and among horticultural tribal societies but I say nothing about them here.

For reasons that I do not entirely understand, people in states want a semi-divine or divine mediator between them and God, Dharma, or the Tao. They feel they cannot get in touch directly with God etc. themselves, and must depend on a mediator. With the mediator, they feel comfortable with requests, such as for healthy children, that they feel might not be appropriate to ask God about. The mere fact of the mediator means they are automatically "in good" with God etc. if they do the right things for worship and some right daily practices such as meditation. Without the mediator, they cannot get "in good" with God etc. on their own no matter how gifted. With the mediator, they are saved; without the mediator, they are doomed. With the mediator, they can be successful in both religious life and in daily practical family, business, community, and political life.

The obvious mediators are the obvious heroes of the major religions ("heroes" is a gender neutral term that includes female heroes). Maybe Jesus fits the pattern most obviously but he is hardly the only figure to meet the pattern. Even when religions stress the humanity of their heroes, they act toward their heroes as if the heroes were divine or semi-divine. (I do not distinguish between divine and semi-divine, as a Christian has to.) The Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, insisted that he was only a man but his followers treat him as a divine mediator. Mohammad insisted he was only a man but Muslims act toward him, or toward his words, as if he were a semi-divine mediator. Officially a bodhisattva is only a human being but Mahayana Buddhists hold them about on the same status that Christians hold the high archangels. Judaism is absolutely clear that no man can be God but they treat Moses, David, and, sometimes the Macabbees as if they were so close to God as to be semi-divine; they effectively worship Moses and David. Hindus are honest about the divine status of their mediators, the avatars.

It helped me greatly to understand the mediator when I began to see the mediator in the context of whole systems. For that, I had to learn several distinct systems. The mediator is part of how the system works. Without the mediator, the system would not work well. Oddly, God cannot play this role because God is needed to keep other parts of the system high, out of reach, and powerful.

(2) The Hole in the Center.

(2.1) World-eating ideologies typically have several ideas about how we Realize the Supreme Spirit and our links to everything, and about how we Ascend and are Saved. The ideas are not sharply defined, and relations between the ideas are not sharply defined. For example, even after millennia, it is still not clear what the persons of the Christian Holy Trinity are, what their relations are, and what their relations are to Mary the Queen of Heaven. It is still not clear how we get grace, who gets grace, and relations of grace to free will and our own efforts.

When many related but indefinite ideas are available, it is easy for people to project on to the system what they want, of course within some broad limits. When people can see what they want, they can do what they want. When they are part of a system that allows them to do what they want, they support the system. Always some people have more power and can interpret the ideas to their favor, and against the advantage of other people, but that is part of the overall situation too.

Think of an abstract painting. It is made of lines, triangles, slashes, bolts, and other figures that are like figures from geometry but are not exact geometric figures such as exact diamonds or pentagons. You can see in it what you wish such as the clash of civilizations over history, the Big Bang, the March of Art, or March of Science. Some Cubism, Joan Miro, or Piet Mondrian also sometimes are like this. Turner's work often is a swirl around an almost-empty center but with something important near the center. Even Baroque and Mannerist painting often was organized this way.

That is what systems with many ideas are like. That is how they eat the world, by absorbing it. You can see what you want in accord with the fashions of the times although it might be easier to see some things than others. You can see both militant conquering of the world or soft love in Christianity and Hinduism depending on fashion.

If paintings don't work well for you, think of the Grand Canyon or some other large canyon with a river running through it and lots of different scenery on all sides of it. Think too of an urban landscape with a lot of variety such as all of New York City – not just Manhattan – or think of all of San Francisco or Los Angeles. Usually major cities have rivers running through them too.

(2.2) Imagine the same painting but with a "hole" in the center, such as a big grainy uneven splotch. Everything seems tied to that hole in the center even without lines or any deliberate links. Everything seems to revolve around that hole in the center even when there is no obvious circular motion in the painting. Even when things seem to deliberately swirl away from the hold in the center, they are still connected to the hole in the center. The connection works better when the thing at the center is a valley rather than a mountain. The hole in the center is like a theme in a song that gets stated at the beginning, gets lost, pops up, gets lost, pops up, and so on. Even when the other music in the song is not directly related to the theme, it seems as if the other music is related to the theme, and it seems as if the whole piece is built on the theme. Pop song usually is not like this, but, if you know any famous stereotypical symphony, such as "Beethoven's Fifth", often it is.

A good example both of "splotches" and the hole in the center is the movie "Pulp Fiction". The splotches are the various scenes, especially evident as splotches because they are out of temporal order and you can read a lot into them. You can see the characters as "splotches" and read what you want into them too. The hole in the center is the briefcase from which comes a golden light. People read many things into that nothingness, and relate what they see in the case with what they make of the other splotches. Vincent and Jules do a lot of their own reading in as the movie goes along.

(2.3) The hole in the center is both positive and negative, both the absorber of the world and the emitter of the world.

(2.4) The hole in the center is closely tied to cosmic principles such as Goodness, Life, Never Ending, Truth, Reincarnation, Freedom, Mutual Dependence, Creativity, Interestingness, Justice, Fairness, Justification, Salvation, etc.

(2.5) Not everybody can relate to cosmic principles so the hole in the center is also tied to lesser but still very important principles such as Business, Prosperity, Family, Family Success, Pride, Honor, Our Group,

Art, etc. These slightly lesser principles sometimes associate with particular splotches in the rest of the painting. People can project these lesser but still important principles on splotches.

(6) Sometimes the center is God or the equivalent such as Dharma, but not as often as you might think, not even in theistic religions. God is too big and powerful. More often the center is a heroic semi-divine person. People need to find their position in relation to the hole in the center but people can only relate well with another person. So, if the hole in the center is filled with another person, then people can relate to the whole system-that-eats-the-world much more easily. All major religions have a person of some kind in the hole at the center.

(2.7) The person at the center is both divine and human.

(2.8) Few people can relate to cosmic principles in the abstract, such as "emptiness", and most people find it hard to relate to lesser principles in the abstract, such as "family". People like to personify cosmic principles, to embody cosmic principles. The semi-divine mediator being at the center of a system that eats the world usually embodies cosmic principles and thus makes them accessible to normal people. Jesus and the bodhisattva embody cosmic Love. Krishna embodies cosmic Joyous Duty and the Perpetuation of Dharma.

(2.9) The semi-divine mediator being at the center of a system does not represent only one cosmic principle. People need an array of cosmic principles. The being at the center takes on various cosmic principles as needed in situations. The cosmic principles are not always compatible but that is not often a problem. Jesus embodies the cosmic principles of Love and stern Justice. Hindu avatars embody the cosmic principles of both Stasis and Change.

I cannot here "hold forth" on how the hole in the middle ties together the system. The hole is like a secret at the heart of a conspiracy movie. When the ideas of religious system contradict, as they usually do, rather than undermine the power of the hole in the center, contradiction deepens how effective the hole in the center is for tying it all together.

Besides painting, much art is like this, especially in giving a screen on which we can project. Sometimes I imagine as many scenarios as I can while listening to long jazz cuts. Some of the most "out there" jazz lends itself well to imaginative projecting such as Eric Dolphy and Thelonius Monk. Ballet music is great for imaginative projecting when you learn to get the original ballet out of your head, as with Tchaikovsky ("The Nutcracker") or Copland ("Rodeo"). Rock "jam" bands from the 2000s, such as Phish or Moe, work the same way. As far as I know, there is no good theory of the evolution of the capacity for art that takes these aspects of art into account.

I do not evaluate ideas such as "Jesus saves" or "Only Mohammad knows the will of God" according to truth. I put them in other contexts and explained them by the role they play, in this case as roles within the context of mystic systems that eat the world. Just because we can look at an idea in several ways does not mean the idea is true or false. Just because we can look at "Jesus saves" or "Only Mohammad" in terms of its role in a system that eats the world does not mean the idea is true or false. After we have seen an idea in various ways, we have to go back to assess the idea on the basis of its truth, as best we can. Sometimes, the use of the idea in other ways can bear on how we assess its truth, but not often.

We cannot explain away ideas by looking at them crookedly. It is a good idea to take ideas at face value to begin with. You have to practice seeing ideas in many ways and in many contexts, and then assessing their truth. I have not yet found a system that eats the world that is fully true in itself; only parts of such systems are true.

Annoyed at Embodied Cosmic Principles.

I dislike the idea that a semi-divine being at the center of system embodies cosmic principles. You will see why as we go along in the book. We don't need it. We get confused by it. If you can do it, you are better off relating directly to God, using the hero of your religion as a guide.

The fact that I don't like systems that eat the world does not mean that every aspect of them is false and bad, or that every such system as a whole is false and bad. Every system relies on some deep and good truths. The fact that I don't like systems that eat the world, with a hole and a semi-divine person at the center, does not mean some systems are not worse than others, and some systems are not better than others. It does not mean all systems are equally false and equally bad. You have to assess for yourself. I hope this book helps.

If you are comfortable in such as system, such as a major religion, then I suggest you think it through to find what is true and good about it, or unreal and maybe bad. You don't have to junk it. Act on what you consider its best principles in line with what you consider to be the best principles in general, such as the Golden Rule. Take a good honest look at other religions. Be honest about their good and bad points. Then do what you think is best.

A Bad Focus-Hole in the Center.

Even in bad systems, the focus-hole in the center usually is good. People wrongly do bad things in the name of good but they still do them in the name of good. Nazis, Empire Communists, Empire Capitalists, and Empire PC people do bad things in the name of something that is good. Most people don't like the idea that the hole in the center might be bad or amoral. They do not build systems around immoral centers. Even Satan worshippers see Satan as a good center, and as a comforter, in relation to them.

In contrast, partly out of suspicion of bad systems, since the 1920s, and especially in detective fiction and in stories about families, American culture has consistently called the center bad. We have repeated images of corrupt politics with corrupt people and corrupt families buried at the center. Every supposedly good family has a skeleton in the closet, and the skeleton still moves. The detective has to peel off layers of hypocrisy and cover-up to find the eventual root of all badness. The psychologist has to unearth layers of bad memories, repression, abuse, and complexes before finally revealing the bad truth that might, or might not, set some of the family members free.

Why we should see systems in these terms in our times is a wonderful question that I can't go into this book. I get into it in other essays on pop culture. The fact that I do not work through the question here is not another instance of a cover-up of a bad system.

Society.

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Thought systems that eat the world depend on vagueness and on the ability to project meanings into the vagueness. Dharma and God's Will are examples. This use of vagueness is alright up to a point but too much vagueness is counter-productive, especially for guardians who want to interpret systems in ways that serve them. Priests are happy if God wills that people should give a regular offering to the Temple in Jerusalem but not that God allows people to make an offering on their own at any "high place" nearby them. It is good if a warrior has the Dharma to protect our city and to conquer our neighbors but not so good if a neighboring king has the Dharma to conquer our city and put all of our priests to death. Dharma and God's Will need some social limits.

People who interpret thought systems usually interpret them so as to reinforce the society in which they want power, status, and security. Thought systems go along with particular societies, usually stratified state societies such as in traditional Europe, India, China, the Middle East, and the United States.

Particular societies, such as India or Europe, mold their major thought systems that eat the world, such as the Dharma system and Christianity's version of God's Will. On the flip side, thought systems mold the societies that they come to attach to. Exactly how this happens is much too big a topic to go into here. I go into it some in the chapter on Hinduism.

How much do traditional thought systems that eat the world change when the society to which they are tied changes? As Hinduism moves away from traditional India into the modern world, how will the Dharma system change? As Europe and America moved away from traditional agrarian and industrial societies into capitalism and intensive technology, what happens to good versus evil?

PART 4: Myth, Chaos, Order, God, and Society

Part 4 and Part 5 explain the influence of some ideas-in-myths from Jewish and Western cultures. Part 4 explains ideas about order, disorder, culture, society, and people. Part 5 explains ideas about rebels and the "Remnant". The myths-ideas shape how we act, how society turns out, and our roles in society. The myths-ideas are not merely grandiose versions of entertainment for kids. Usually people follow the myths unconsciously without knowing where they got the ideas. In conforming, people think they act freely, naturally, rightly, and independently. No American President since at least John Kennedy has been elected without unconsciously appealing to these myths.

Sometimes the myths-ideas lead to good. Yet when society has root problems that people will not face, as we have now, the myths-ideas lead to excuses and to reinforcing bad organization.

Do not dismiss the ideas just because they are in myths. The ideas might still be correct enough to guide us. Rather, as with other ideas that evolved beings have, assess according to truth and usefulness even if the ideas are embedded in myths. Use the ideas-in-myths to think with as long as they are useful. Let the myths guide you to better understanding as long as you don't also let them mislead you.

After the West became important around the world, these myths also shaped non-Western life. Non-Western cultures have their own versions of similar myths but I cannot here describe them. Take what you find here and apply it as you can to non-Western life.

Introduction: Bad Chaos, Good Moderate Order, Bad Hyper-order.

Like Goldilocks' porridge, order can be divided into hyper-order, moderate order, and disorder or chaos. Each type has good versions and bad versions. Each type is more likely or less likely to come with the decent persons that we like to see. Chaos can arise from no order at all, from too much order, from the overlap of different kinds of order, even the overlap of different kinds of moderate order. Chaos can be like the disorder from owning too much stuff, seeing too much TV, or having too many choices. I don't specify what causes chaos; and I call it all "disorder" or "chaos".

Almost every group and every person says that, in theory, too much order and too much chaos are bad while moderate order is good.

Within "good moderate order" are many varieties. Cultures, political theorists, and economists differ on the details of what order is good or bad. Nearly all cultures think they have the right kind and amount of order, and the good people that go along with it. In America, in a car, we tolerate teenagers draping their feet high on the seat in front while in Japan and Thailand they do not. In America, we think creativity and chaos go together. We think too much order stifles creativity. We would rather err on the side of chaos-and-creativity than on the side of order. Until recently, most of the rest of the world preferred to err on the side of too much order.

Sometimes whole assemblages of order, culture, society, and kinds of persons come together, mutually reinforce each other, and are fairly stable. Despite charming confusion, a "farmers' market" is ordered, you are likely to see some kinds of people there but not others, the general atmosphere encourages that kind of person, and that kind of person encourages the general atmosphere. Despite apparent disorder, American society is stable and is ordered along lines of socio-economic class, ethnicity, gender, age, and religion; the apparent disorder and the real underlying order produce Americans; and Americans produce American order. Stalinism was highly ordered, produced particular kinds of awful people, and was stable. The kinds of people that Stalinism produced helped reproduce Stalinism.

We would like stable assemblages to make good people, and good people to make stable assemblages, but that doesn't happen as often as we need. When it happens, we should hold on to it. Some countries have that.

Usually people want chaos to turn into good moderate order, as when a forest arises again after a fire or an economy builds again after a recession. Sometimes people see good moderate order as coming from hyper-order, usually by toning down hyper-order: the end of the Middle Ages due to the capitalist free market or loosening of European and Japanese societies due to influence by Americans. Often hyper-ordered societies have to be broken first, and go through chaos, before they can find good moderate order. Americans see this breaking in the demise of fascism and Communism. Now the world sees it in Luke's overthrow of Emperor Darth Sidious in the modern epic "Star Wars". It remains to be seen what kind of moderate order will arise in a galaxy far away. Hindu myths also record these ideas about order, and about preserving good moderate order, as when Shiva shakes loose (destroys) a hyper-ordered bad society (world) and Vishnu restores good moderate order; see the chapter on Hinduism.

Rarely does good moderate order stay in the middle where the best of everything lies. Good moderate order wobbles. It veers toward chaos (looseness or laxness) or toward hyper-order (strictness). People used to say it swings like a pendulum. Societies, and subgroups within societies, differ about whether it is worse for order to be a little too loose or a little too strict. They differ on which tendency is likely to be more dangerous and lead to bad problems, which tendency is likely to break good moderate order out of orbit altogether.

Stereotypically, young people enjoy some chaos but fear hyper-order while old people fear chaos and feel comfortable with some hyper-order. Conservatives fear that bad hyper-order comes from looseness (left wing ideology and behavior); and Conservatives tolerate some hyper-order to avoid bad chaos from bad looseness. Liberals fear that bad hyper-order comes from any hyper-order (strong Republican business state) and are willing to tolerate much chaos to avoid that bad result.

Ideas about order, disorder, right people, and right institutions, usually do not use terms of hyper-order, moderate order, and chaos but terms of a dual opposition between "yes" and "no". It is easier to think in terms of "yes" and "no", "good" and "bad", than to think of gradations and process, and try to find a mixed good middle. But the "yes" and "no" were themselves set in a broader stage of chaos, moderate order, and hyper-order.

For a long time, the "no" and "yes" of duality was "chaos" versus "order". Chaos was badness, and good order arose from it. People didn't worry much about hyper-order unless they were oppressed by foreign invaders, and, even then, as long as taxes were no higher, still didn't worry about hyper-order. "The enemy of our good order is chaos. Chaos is bad. When our good order breaks down, what we get is bad chaos. When we tame bad chaos, what we get is good order, our good order."

One reason people think in dual terms rather than in terms of hyper-order, moderate order, and chaos is that people fear one pole more than the other. If you fear chaos more than hyper-order, then you fix on the border between chaos versus good moderate order, and think in those terms. You don't worry about hyper-order or you glamorize it. Your group's order is good moderate order even if it is really fascism. If you fear hyper-order, then you fix on the border between hyper-order versus good moderate order, and think in those terms. You don't worry about chaos or you glamorize it. Your group's order is the good moderate order even if your group is really is plagued by self-indulgence, broken families, living off the state, aimless lost lives, hollow education, gangsters, and a reaction against general order that amounts to another version of fascism.

Since about 1800, Americans often think in terms of bad old rigid hyper-order versus good new somewhat chaotic order. In the past, ideals of good order were more akin to hyper-order than to chaos. Now, ideals of good order are more akin to chaos than to hyper-order. Real hyper-order, real strictness, is bad. Hyper-order is the new bad chaos. It is better to err on the side of too much chaos than on the side of a little hyper-order.

I don't like the platitude that extremes turn into their opposites (too much love becomes like hate) but here is a case where it is useful. Allowing too much hyper-order becomes a kind of chaos; it stultifies us into chaos. Allowing too much chaos brings compensating bad hyper-order, such as cults, desperate need for

political or religious leaders, silly ideas of rebellion, and chronic bad attitude for no good reason. We lose the middle and the self. All this is one theme in the movie "The Breakfast Club".

I know the usefulness of thinking dually and I too despise bad old hyper-order. Still, that thinking is too simplistic, not mature, and not up to the needs of citizenship. Adept citizens should see varieties of order, chaos, moderate order, and hyper-order. We need to think what causes what. We need to think what is good and bad. We need to think what we want and how to get it. We need to realistically see whether chaos or hyper-order makes the most danger, and when. We need to get past Conservative and Liberal.

Don't get confused, especially by Liberals and Conservatives. Much of their attitudes have more to do with what people tell themselves than with what they really think and really do. In reality, Conservatives tolerate a lot of disorder in the economy and among the "lower classes" as long as the disorder serves them and they keep their order at the top. Disorder among the lower classes keeps them fighting among themselves. Most Liberal disorder is fashion statement, youthful drug use, and youthful sexual dalliance. Liberals are rebels for a few years. Liberals praise disorder among the other classes because it helps to insure that Liberal kids go to the best schools and have the best jobs. Some Liberal groups are among the best ordered I have ever seen, especially those organized by non-traditional genders such as some lesbians and gay men. Working class people are rebels in their own minds when they drive big cars or off-road vehicles, or when they get fat watching violent sports on TV. Really they lead lives well-ordered by the needs of work, and their kids fall into line when it comes down to rules for hard partying and the rules for making a living.

Tanakh (Old Testament) Myths (1): Description.

Contrary to popular misconception, the Bible has more than one origin story (myth) about how the world began. In each myth, God imposes the right good moderate order, the best that is possible between bad chaos and bad hyper-order. I focus on story (3) below about Tiamat. Search the myths on the Internet. The numbering below intends to make reading easier, not to look like a math text and so to scare you.

(1) Genesis, Chapter 1, Verses 1 to 23 (Genesis 1:1-23). The first myth is the familiar story of God willing (saying, speaking, declaring, wording) things into being, such as light and land, over six "days", and then resting on the seventh day. God is good, and his creation is good. God is creative, alive, and the source of life. Life gets its life from God's life. God asserts godliness through commands, that is, laws. People participate in the order of God when they know his commands and follow them. When people follow his commands, they get stable well-ordered good society, a good life, a long abundant life, and participate in the creativity of God.

(2) Genesis 2:4-24. Here is the familiar story of Adam, Eve, the Trees, the Fruit, and the Serpent. In story (1), God makes Adam and Eve together while in this story (2) God makes Eve from Adam's rib to insure Adam has help and does not get lonely – see the movie "Adam's Rib" with Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn. The beginning of this story shows God asserting good balanced order between chaos and too much order, as when God makes the Garden and gives Adam and Eve everything but one Tree. The end shows God restoring the best balanced order possible after Adam, Eve, and the Serpent ruined the original best balanced order. I do not stress this myth here and so I do not dwell on my interpretation as just given. My interpretation does fit in with what I have to say using myth (3).

(3) Job 41:1-34. Hebrews, and so Jews, share the third myth with many peoples of the Middle East. The third myth tells how God tamed chaos to make stuff such as safe land, to make our ordered world, and foster society. In Job, chaos is "Tiamat" the "dragon", "worm", or "crocodile". The King James Version translated the Hebrew word as "Leviathan". Leviathan is now the traditional term in English. But that term overlooks the Hebrew original and the link between Hebrew stories and other stories in the Middle East. It is better to use "Tiamat". Tiamat is not a fire dragon as in European myth but a water dragon more like Chinese myth. In Job, God also is good and his creation is good. God is creativity and life. People get all the same benefits of following God's commands in this myth (3) as in myth (1). In modern terms, we say Tiamat "symbolizes" bad chaos but in mythic terms Tiamat just is without implying any particular symbolism. Tiamat and chaos are not necessarily morally bad but they are dangerous, and it is better when they are subject to order. Where the myth likely originated, in the marshes of Southern Iraq, flood was a problem. People who have grown up in the Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition know how important the first and second myths are but do not often know how important this myth is. The names of the players, and their exact identities, change in different times and places but the drama stays the same: chaos is powerful, and a powerful being has to tame chaos so as to make stuff, impose order, make life secure, promote, goodness, and life, and allow society to flourish.

(4) Genesis 5:32-10:1. This is the story of Noah, the Flood, and the Ark. For a fun version with political messages, and with morality overcoming bad politics, see the movie by Steve Carrell. For a version that is aggressively vivid, just dark enough and so modern, see the movie with Russell Crowe, Jennifer Connelly, and Emma Watson.

(5) Isaiah 34:14. This passage mentions "Lilith". This passage does not tell the story of Lilith or give a clear idea of what the name "Lilith" refers to. That material is in several other places in Jewish literature and other literature of the Middle East. Even then, the reference is not clearly to one person or being. The story is not relevant here except that Lilith was usually taken as a negative chaotic female dark force ("night spirit") that has to be controlled by a positive orderly male light force of God, usually through a representative of God, usually by a man. Then this view was seen as patriarchic and bad, and Lilith was redeemed to be the symbol of the original natural complex multi-faceted feminine. See feminist literature and "vampire" literature, movies, and TV where Lilith serves modern ideas of gender. Search "Lilith Fair". See the TV show "Supernatural" about the Winchester brothers.

(6) The "Pentateuch", or first Five Books of the Tanakh (Old Testament), is the origin story of the Hebrew people, Israel, and the later Jewish nation. In particular, the story of Moses leading the Hebrews out of Egypt and to the Promised Land of Canaan is an origin story of the (later) Israelite nation, if not the whole world. The Exodus story and the story of making Israel have many instances of a good balanced order between chaos and hyper-order but I do not pursue them here.

(7) The entire New Testament, especially the Gospel of John. (7A) John says Jesus was present from the beginning of time and was the actual creator of the world, apparently acting on the authority (Will) of God the Father. In myth (1) (seven days), in the Christian view, God created the world through his Word, and, in John, Jesus is the Word. The Word is God too. The Word creates and gives order. John does not make clear if Jesus is the one (Word) who parted the land and water, made the sun and moon, etc. John does not make clear if Jesus is the Spirit that carried out the commands and that "moved on the

water", and does not make clear Jesus' relation to the Spirit in the Tanakh. (7B) Effectively, the world is totally recreated spiritually due to Jesus being born as a human, living, being executed, coming back to life, and going up again to Heaven in Glory. Jesus plays the new Moses but more creatively and on a much larger scale, leading all of humanity to the new world that he just (re-) created. I would guess that, in the standard Christian view, the new order of Jesus is the best balanced order between chaos and hyper-order but neither John nor other New Testament writers make a point of this view, so I do not stress it here either.

(7 continued) Whatever ordering that God the Father does, can be credited to Jesus as well; and Jesus does his own ordering of chaos too, as when he organizes the poor, casts out demons, heals people, provides food, and institutes the Eucharist. As a sacrament that combines flesh and spirit, the Eucharist is a balance between the poor order of the body and the hyper-order of only-spirit. The Devil revolted at precisely this balanced mixed better order.

(7 continued) As far as I can tell, orthodox Christian theology interprets the idea that Jesus created the world to mean that Jesus and the Father are outside time. So, although not completely correct to say Jesus was "before" time, that way of saying gives the sense of Jesus as "beyond" time and as creator of the world. Orthodox Christianity rejects the idea that God the Father made Jesus within the flow of time-as-we-know-it, and then, later in the same flow of time, Jesus, as a creature of God, made the world. Jesus and God are co-eternal and co-creators.

It is wrong to think of absolute chaos on one side versus the absolute rigid right order of God on the other. That thinking misses the mark and leads to mistakes. Rather, God sets order that is a good compromise between the two absolutes and that is superior to the two absolutes. He finds the good compromise in the middle. God's order is creatively goodly flexible. Originally in stories (1) and (2), God's compromise order is the absolute best that could be achieved under any circumstances. In story (2), God's best order is ruined, so God finds the best compromise good order that can be achieved in the new situation. In the terms of C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, and other theologians, when the Devil turns God's good into evil, God makes a responding good that is even greater-and-better than the original good. The better middle is a major theme in Buddhism as well, the "Middle Path".

God does not eliminate chaos; he tames it. He calls on chaos when annoyed, as when he sent the flood in the time of Noah and sent fire down on Sodom and Gomorrah. Examples of hyper-order and of how God does not like hyper-order are not as common as examples of dangerous chaos. When the Hebrews had chiefs and prophets but not kings and high priests, the Hebrews wanted kings like the neighbors; see below the story of David. God told the Hebrews that this order is hyper-order, is a mistake, and would turn out badly in many ways. The Hebrews persisted in jealousy of kingly neighbors. Finally God let them have their way anyhow – and bad results did follow. Worshipping mammon and power is a kind of hyper-order and it is wrong. Insisting on pure spirituality without any admixture of materiality, sensation, and life is a wrong hyper-order whether the mistake is made by fallen angels, Agent Smith, or super smart machines. Most hyper-order is like chaos in its bad effects. In the New Testament and Christian writings after, bad hyper-order is the Pharisees – this view is wrong but accepted. In modern views, hyper-order is Fascism, Communism, Left PC, big business, plots for world security and thus world domination, and the Sith Emperor. In "Harry Potter" books, bad hyper-order is both the English middle class which represses magic, as with Harry's aunt and uncle, and the Pure Bloods and Death Eaters who want rigid

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blood-based class-based magic-powered fascism. Hogwarts, with love, friends, magic, "mudbloods", and clever naughtiness, is the happy middle.

Life, Reason, Emotion, Creativity, Inspiration, and Art.

(A) (1) Matter; (2) Life; (3) Clever Hyper-Ordered Systems, often now with Machines
(B) (1) Reason; (2) Creative Inspiration; (3) Emotion
(C) (1) Craft; (2) Creative Real Art; (3) Imitative Artificial Derivative Poser
(D) Mechanical; Organic, of Life; Super-Organic Hyper-Ordered, akin to Death
(E) Death; Clever Creative Organized Life; Overly Complex Social Institutional Life
(F) Socially Culturally Unaware but OK Person; Real Genuine Person; Poser
(G) Mere Factoid; Real and True; Unreal, Illusory, Delusory, False
(H) Dependently real and so unreal; Becoming; Fully real and enduring
(I) Mere Rote or Technique; Creative Cleverness; Uncreative Hyper-Cleverness
(J) Mechanical; Nature, Natural, and Lively; Social, Imitative, Contrived Life
(K) No Choice; Choice leading to best outcome; Too much choice that amounts to no choice
(L) One kind of bad hyper-order; Good moderate order; Another kind of bad hyper-order

This section describes some sets of ideas that Westerners use to understand and assess order. I do not deal with all the sets listed above, only A, B and C. The issues come up again later. The ideas here link up with ideas above about God giving order but I do not point out the details.

Here I write using triples. People also think in terms of twos, threes, fours, fives, or more but it is clearer here to use one format. You should see links and parallels between the sets of triples.

Do not expect consistency within triples or between them. Contradiction happens even if it shouldn't. Interplay and confusion is part of the fun, part of how ideas hold minds, and of how people use ideas to control themselves and others; but I can't go into all that.

I do not assess much for truth or usefulness. Liberals (Left) and Conservatives (Right) both rely heavily on these categories but in different ways.

(A) Mere matter consists of things such as particles of dirt and billiard balls. Matter is still matter even if it is totally unorganized. Matter can be organized but not usually by itself. In contrast, we have Life. Life is made of matter but is more than mere matter. Life is not life if it is not organized, and life organizes itself. Matter gets pushed around by other matter but Life also acts on its own. Life is creative. In contrast to both mere matter and to moderately organized Life, we have clever hyper-ordered systems that act alive, such as mad computers and malevolent storms. The modern symbol for such systems is the super smart machine. A bad system is instantiated in matter so that the matter moves and has intent but the matter still is not alive, like vampires were before they got glamorous. Matter is morally neutral and matter can be used for bad (Death Star) or good (Robbie the Robot). Hyper-ordered machines and hyper-ordered society are bad. Life is in-between. It is ordered but not hyper-ordered. As something in-between mere matter and hyper-order, Life transcends both. Life should be all-good although it can fall to the bad. Life is creative and inspired in a way that mere machines cannot be; see below.

God is Life, the source of Life, model for all Life, and inspiration for the Life in all living things. God is the source above mere matter and hyper-ordered systems. God is creative and the source of creativity. Evil is the cunning artificial imitation of God, the Life in God, he Life from God, and God's creativity.

For a fun apt modern "take" on this three-fold contrast of mere matter, Life, and hyper-organized system, read about complexity theory. Melanie Mitchell wrote an excellent non-mathematical popular introduction. Some theorists make a point of seeing Life as on the cusp between chaotic no organization and rigid hyper-organization.

(B) Westerners have been plagued by a contrast between emotion and reason. Just as matter and mad machines have their in-between so does emotion and reason. It is: inspired reason, driven by emotion, and guided by morality; inspiration as the guide to emotion, morality, and reason; and inspiration informed by reason and morality, and driven by emotion. Think of Dr. McCoy as emotion, Mr. Spock and Sheldon as too much dry reason, and Captain Kirk as the successful inspired blend. Inspiration as the good mix of reason and emotion is one big source of life and the success of life. Reason, emotion, and inspiration can be good or bad in their own ways but we think of them as good when good people do them.

The bad version of inspiration is "cunning". It is too much reason, too much emotion, and too much order, with no guidance from morality, and no guidance from the reasoning of others, as when Hitler rose or the Emperor Darth Sidious in "Star Wars" planned and carried out his rise. In the "Star Wars" movies, when Jedi are overly-committed to reason with no emotion, they cannot defeat the Sith. The Sith use emotion but guide their emotion not with the proper mix of reason and morality but with a bad use of cunning – the Sith are more than just emotion unbridled, they are more than Dr. McCoy. The best result happens when the Dark Side and Light Side are unified in true inspiration guided by reason and morality.

(C) Craft happens when someone whittles a stick to produce the image of a pet guinea pig. Art happens when someone knows what he-she is doing and produces something pleasing, and-or new, and-or we can learn from it, and-or the result is clever mostly in a good way, such as painting the Mona Lisa, writing "King Lear", or whittling on a rock to produce "David". Art is Creative. Artifice is making things that might be useful but are not art. Artificial things can imitate art. Most of the things that people build are either craft or artifice. Artifice is mere technique where art is inspired and lively. Art is the Gettysburg Address by Lincoln; craft is what we get from an honest news source; and artifice is what we hear too often from politicians and commentators. Art can be bad or good but modern people see it as mostly good. Craft can be good or bad, but, in real life apart from myth, often is good, as when engineers build a suspension bridge using no new techniques, but one that is still great. Modern people see artifice as phony, fake, derivative, merely imitative, often bad, not fully real, and conducive to death. Art is genuine, creative, alive, and real. The original meaning of "artifice" was "made through an art", much like what we now call a craft; now anything not made with inspiration and creativity we see as merely and entirely "artificial", as dead in its way and as promoting death. Artifice can seem creative and inspired but really it is neither, it only imitates the true creativity and inspiration of art. True art seems an inspiration from God while artifice is merely human-made or Devil-made. The most artificial clever cunning artifice is from the Devil – a false poser artist. His work looks interesting and fools many people, but, at bottom, it has no true new creation, life, and inspiration. No matter how clever, artifice is artifice, mere imitation, and leads to death. The Devil always loses the fiddling context to a true creative inspired human artist. God is Creative and an artist. His greatest creation is the work that we call the world.

People "into" alternative rock see most pop music as modestly malevolent posing phony fake artifice that serves to quiet the masses. People against abortion see the procedure as a mere artificial technique out of control, and a tool of death. People who support choice, and allow abortion, see the procedure as a useful craft, one that also supports Life when used correctly. Craft is a house; art is a home; and artifice is the Hotel California (the place in the song, not the song, which is art).

(1) Low order or chaos: Taking each motif ("emotion") above as a singlet with no attempt to link them or arrange them. (3) Hyper-order leading to mistakes and bad effects: Forcing all motifs into sets of triples, each triple to represent a theme, all triples into one big scheme, and forcing perfect parallels between all triples. (2) Proper modest order: Hopefully about what I did: Find what patterns help explain how people think and what they do, and take into account cultural history and natural links such as between matter, strong systems, and machines.

It is fun to look at media to see how writers, directors, and actors play with these ideas. It is fun to think about where nature, society, and gender fit. Who is more full of Life, Inspiration, and Creative Art, women or men? In what arenas? If men are more artistic, does that mean women are necessarily artificial? Is society art or artifice? Who is the artist or artificer? Was David Bowie more art or artifice? Was David, King of Israel, more cunning or inspired? What is R2D2? Is nature merely matter?

Tanakh (Old Testament) Myths (2): Historical Developments, and Comments.

I collapse the third (Tiamat, Leviathan) and fourth (Noah and flood) myths under one, and refer to it as the third myth. I describe modern versions of order, chaos, and hyper-order to show how the myths have influenced our ideas of society, politics, and economics.

(3A) The third myth about chaos and order became more important in Western culture than the first myth but not in exactly the same terms given in the Bible. The third myth changed its terms somewhat before outdoing the first myth. The fact that the third myth changed its terms does not make it a different myth; it is the same myth in other clothes. To make this shift even more complicated, the third myth comes in two versions, and the two versions of the third myth fought with each other for popularity and dominance. It is the mix of the two versions of the third myth that displaced the first myth.

(3A) The first version of the third myth is similar to the Bible. For readers who remember political science from school, the first version of the third myth (3A) was stated by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Nature is naturally "red in tooth and claw", that is, chaotic. Natural people are individualistic, not sociable. Natural people are not noble but beasts, always at war with each other. Life is nasty, brutish, and short. Only by giving up some natural freedom to a greater authority, that is, to society and the state, can people tame nature, tame their own nature, and have order, peace, long life, abundant life, and real practical lasting freedom. Only by imposing order on chaos can people find life, goodness, security, wealth, and abundance. Real practical lasting freedom is truer freedom than natural freedom because it is securer and longer lasting.

Modern evolutionary theory has its version of 3A. Originally evolving humans had naked self-interest but no morality. Interactions without morality are chaotic. For various reasons, mostly due to the value to

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evolving human individuals of regular ordered interactions, humans evolved morality as a way to sustain ordered relations. These people out-competed the people without morality. The evolutionary version is a variation of Hobbes and Locke and a variation of taming chaos. That does not mean it isn't true. I think it is true even though the original idea might have had roots in a myth. Remember, we judge ideas by their truth rather than their origin.

To Hobbes and Locke, the American revolutionaries added: A good society mixes natural individualistic chaos with the hyper-order of tyranny. A good society seeks good moderate order. A good society builds institutions that preserve good moderate order and that let individual people rebuild good moderate order each generation. Depending on historical situations, several such compromises might be workable in different societies-cultures or in different periods.

To Hobbes and Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau added: Society orders nature, subsumes nature, and orders individual humans into a greater whole. By doing that, society-culture is in effect God; the rules-and-traditions of society take on the force of the Will of God; and the supposed Will of God is really the will of society, the General Will, in disguise. In its role as order-maker of the world, usually society is creative, good, and the basis of life. Rousseau had several views of relations between individuals and society. Rousseau did not always distinguish between the "general will" as what arises from individuals in a group but then persists, such as in a democracy, versus the general will as what comes from society apart from the individuals that make up society and that dominates individuals in a society. In one view, society dominates individual minds through appearing as the Will of God. Individual people are within society and secondary to society; society is what matters. In this view, society can be good or bad. This view influenced sociology and anthropology, which, until the 1980s, usually took society to be good. In one variation of this view, society is bad. One socio-economic class, the aristocrats and priests, usurped the right to speak for society, dominated the other classes, and stole from other classes. Variations of this view contributed to Marxism and other Leftist critiques of society. Different groups that wished to see individuals and society differently adopted the version of Rousseau that suited their agenda. (100 years later, Emile Durkheim explicitly, and wrongly, identified society-culture with god (religion) in society; people worship society as god; religion is the rules for worshipping society and the rules by which society makes and remakes itself. That is another story.)

Later religious zealots made trouble because they insisted that society, especially hyper-ordered society, is indeed god on Earth. To follow society is to be godly and to be at odds with society is to be demonic. We use this hyper-religious version today when we call for "law and order" and seek the basis for our laws in the Commandments of God and only there. John Calvin always strikes me this way.

(3B) A second version (3B) of the third origin myth (3) grew increasingly important after about 1600, and pretty much dominates today. It is similar to the idea that goodness wins because it is good but does so through a system, a special kind of system. Chaos does not need an external agent to order it and chaos does not need a social contract to order it. Eventually chaos orders itself. Chaos is indeed at first chaotic and bad, but, if left alone, under the right conditions, order arises naturally out of chaos. Chaos orders itself as if it were a big person, as if it were God or society. God works through chaos. Chaos is creative as God was creative in Myth (1). Chaos represents God. Order not only arises but order persists unless something harsh happens. The order could be good or bad, but, again for reasons I can't go into here, order that arises naturally and persists is almost always good. Creative Chaos is good, just as God was

good in all the myths. When chaos-and-people are left to their own devices they do not make a Golden Calf or any other idols but instead naturally seek the implicit order-Laws of God. People have to submit to the good order that arises naturally, and that submission is not usually hard. Submitting to good natural order does not require giving up much of our natural nature as in version (3A) but only involves stressing some parts of our nature while de-stressing other parts. We adapt to the order, we do not impose the order and the order does not impose itself on us directly. We have a system. The Laws of God have now become the laws of system, society, culture, tradition, government, and economy. This is what American Revolutionaries had in mind with their balanced compromises.

(3B1) The second version about order spontaneously arising from chaos plays a big role in modern ideas about a good economy and good government. The idea in economic terms (3B1) was first stated well by Adam Smith in 1776 in his famous book "The Wealth of Nations". If people play the market game fairly; and if people buy and sell freely, without much arbitrary external regulation imposed on them; then the result is always good. The end result usually is much better than could be achieved if any state ordered the economy. In this case, individualism leads not to chaos but to good moderate order. A system arises by itself and sustains itself. This good outcome happens not because people are good at heart; indeed they are not very good at heart, and they are always self-interested, although they are not often wicked. This good result of Smith's model happens not because people seek the greater welfare but just because they seek their own interest. We are better off not fighting for the victory of good directly through the state but letting good win by itself through a self-making system. Along the way, Smith did criticize business people loudly. He criticized the hyper-order that comes of business firms colluding and when state helps firms as with "corporate welfare". Smith's version is not entirely realistic but it is fairly realistic and it is realistic enough that it can serve as a basis for policy if we accept that a real economy has serious faults and that well-intended well-educated civil servants have to regulate any real economy.

Instead of realistic Smith, what prevailed is the purposely unrealistic version of the Business Right Wing: the state, labor unions, workers, interest groups, watchdogs, and non-business private people can never set up a system in which good wins. Nor can they serve as the champions of good. They are the untamed Tiamat. Only business people can set up the proper moderate order and the proper system so that good wins through the system that rests on them. Business people do so by seeking greatest profits, sometimes (really often) with the help of the state. It might be that individual firms and business people seek the Golden Calf. But, collectively, business firms, and the people through business firms, miraculously find the Law of God, a good economy, abundant life (goods and services), and good society. They create indirectly but they still create. Good arises out of chaos, not out of prior good. If we want a stable orderly economy that leads to the most good, then let business firms do as they will.

There is an equally unrealistic version from the left but I don't present it here. You can take the chapter on Romanticism as a criticism of the left version.

(3B2) The second version of the myth in terms of democracy: People naturally love freedom and they naturally respect both their own freedom and the freedom of other people. You can't have freedom for only one person in a group, yourself. If anybody is to be free, all people must be free. Sadly, freedom is not found in most human societies. Most people live in non-freedom. In most cases, non-freedom is a kind of chaos. We have to move from bad non-freedom to good freedom and good democracy. Luckily, we can do so just by waking people up to the fact that they are metaphysical persons who thus deserve

political freedom, and-or just by removing the tyranny of a despot or of bad institutions (such as slavery or the rule of wealthy people). Culture, religion, society, history, ecology, material conditions, poverty, and socio-economic class don't matter. If a kind wise person explains that they are persons and thus should have mutual regard and democracy, almost inevitably they will develop mutual regard and democracy. Not only do people seek freedom abstractly and for themselves personally, they seek concrete freedom in particular practices such as voting and free enterprise, and they seek freedom for other people and for society as a whole. People can naturally find the right institutions for freedom. The right institutions for freedom are bundled together as democracy. So people naturally seek and find democracy whenever they are not bound by some chaos, including tyranny. Out of chaotic bad non-freedom will come good freedom if we leave people alone. This freedom is creative, life giving, and good.

Unlike Locke and Hobbes, now we think of people as being not-free free not so much due to chaos as due to tyranny. In fact, likely people are fettered as much by chaos now as by tyranny, for example, the chaos of the "free" but unfair market leads to as much bondage as the direct tyranny of business firms and rich people. Business firms use the chaos of the market to enslave debtors. Sometimes they cause chaos to get more debtors or to make people more in debt, such as with manipulation of terms for buying a house. Let these issues go to focus on bondage that is caused by tyranny.

Tyranny is a type of hyper-order, like the Hebrews wishing for kings instead of judges or Russian people wishing to return to Stalin. I could argue fairly successfully that hyper-order is almost always bad and it is a kind of metaphysical chaos. Rather than indulge that way, I simply assert that hyper-order, especially kinds of tyranny, is one of the conditions that lead to freedom and that, ideally, can be cured simply by telling people that they are persons and urging them to act accordingly. We take the same approach to curing hyper-order and tyranny as to curing chaos. We seek the right good moderate order and we do so by showing people that they are persons. All the rest follows naturally without needing to do more. This is the method that Captain Kirk used to save planets run by computers or enslaved by Klingons, and that Captain Picard used to destroy the Borg Collective from within.

In modern politics, (3B2) means that, for true democracy to arise and persist among any peoples, in any nation, any religion, or any culture, with any historical background, and any historical arc, all we need do is remove bad government. We don't have to interfere to install any particular institutions, not even good democratic ones. We don't have to educate. We don't have to prepare. All we have to do is help people to "develop" and-or to burst away from tyranny and then people automatically naturally will find and hold the best democracy themselves. In fact, if we do try to educate, prepare, or set up, we thwart the natural self-ordering out of chaos that leads to robust democracy. We lead to hyper-order badness and death instead of to the moderate good order, goodness, creativity, and life that is typical of natural freedom and democracy. We violate the "prime directive". We do not have to, and should not, "nation build". We see this myth (3B2) in stories about a cowboy who comes into a town to fight bad ranchers, saloon keepers, or miners who have terrorized the people, and the people rise up to make democracy. See "High Plains Drifter" and "Open Range". Outside the Old West, rock and roll can liberate a town as in "Footloose" and "The California Kid". We see it when labor union activists strive to help workers rise up and organize themselves as in "Norma Rae". America freed Europe after World War Two, and all Europeans, who had been under Fascist tyranny, quickly set up robust lasting democracy. After America knocked off Saddam Hussein, Iraqis were supposed to set up a Western-style democracy although Iraq was a mix of at least

three hostile ethnic groups. After America kicked the Taliban out of Afghanistan for a while, Afghanis were supposed to set up a Western-style democracy right away.

In the Enlightenment, scientists held to the first version of the myth (3A) where God defeats chaos. They thought in terms of God as a "geometer" who imposed order on some kind of original chaos. Since the rise of Quantum Mechanics and ideas about the Big Bang, after about 1935, scientists lean more to the version in which chaos orders itself (3B). The universe came out of nothing. Natural laws spring from nothing. Modern ideas about biological evolution are about chaos ordering itself.

Without going into a lot of hoopla, all non-scientific versions of this myth are partly correct but all non-scientific versions are also mostly wrong. If we take them at face value, it is better to think of them all as wrong because of the harm that they potentially do. We gain a lot from a free economy but we cannot have unregulated capitalism in which the rich enslave the poor; we need to regulate capitalism; the trick is to do the job well; and that trick we have not mastered. All people do not automatically easily find robust democracy if all we do is remove oppression. People need education and need help with institutions. It is much better if they have traditions that support education and the right institutions. That is why people in Japan and Korea do much better at democracy than people in Africa.

For scientific versions of the myths, it does not matter where the ideas came from; it only matters if the ideas can be assessed scientifically, usually by seeing if they are wrong or if they are more correct than alternatives. Assessing scientific versions requires skills apart from telling myths, skills from within science itself, and I cannot go into that topic here. It is good that myths generate ideas for science; and it is even better that science can then assess ideas according to science and apart from the logic of myth.

A few more developments of the second version of the third myth (3B) of "chaos orders itself" are important. These developments are related to the version in which all people naturally grow democracy but I label them here separately so as not to confuse.

(3B3) The third development is that "The People" are always correct. When intellectuals differ from "the people", the intellectuals are always wrong and "the people" are always right. The people are a fund of knowledge and wisdom, and intellectuals cannot fathom this fund. When the people need guidance, or whenever the need is great, wisdom will spring from the repository of the people, and save the people. We find this idea in stories of Robin Hood where Robin personifies the people and their wisdom. We find it in "Lord of the Rings" where the wise could not figure out how to destroy the Ring and defeat Sauron the Evil. It was left to Hobbits, the people, to find a way. The way of the people led to the end of evil and death from hyper-order (Nazgul) and chaos (orcs), and led to the return of the King, good moderate order, life, abundant life, society, and creativity. The people, as represented by four hobbits, bow to no one. This development too often leads to simplistic populist hyper-democracy. I found this myth in Thailand as the modern idea that the "house people", villagers, ("chaaw baan") always are smarter than intellectuals, politicians, and urbanites, and always know the right solution if only the politicians would listen to them. It is likely this development was imported into Thailand by students and NGOs who both had been trained by Westerners.

(3B4) In a corrupt society, the wisdom of the people is found in the underbelly of society and in rebels. It is not found in the obvious rulers and moral examples of society, the politicians, churches, clerics, official

artists, and not even in the majority of the people themselves. Almost all modern societies are corrupt. When Hebrew state society went bad under Saul, the spirit of a true good society was invested (literally anointed) in the rebel David and his gang of outsiders. In a corrupt society, the majority of people have been duped. In this development, the rebels and outsiders are like the Hebrew prophets who had to forcibly lead the people to God's goodness. The rebels and underbelly are the true creative chaos of society. They are creative. Other people are not creative. They are closer to the "Living God" and to "Life" than other segments of society. Only when the ideas of the rebels and underbelly suffuse society can society throw off its coils of chaos and order itself in goodness. If you want to participate in creative chaos, Life, and godliness, then live with rebels and the underbelly rather than with the tyrannical chaos or uncreative chaos of other groups. This view is so common in the modern world, and so common in all art, that it is hard to mention any major movie or TV show that does not use it. Any sci-fi epic, such as "Star Wars" is based on this myth. See below for more about rebels.

(3B5) The fifth, Conservative, version of chaos ordering itself was well stated by Edmund Burke in the late 1700s and early 1800s, partially in response to Adam Smith's assertion that unfettered individuals always lead to greatest good, partly in response to the successful American Revolution, and largely in response to the horrible French Revolution. Unbridled individuals are chaos whether in nature or in a bad state such as a revolutionary state. Chaos does order itself but only indirectly and slowly. We cannot look to unbridled individuals to rise above chaos; this is a lesson of "Lord of the Flies". We need something to control individuals and to keep order. We need something to guide the self-formation of good order. The truly important actor is society rather than individuals. Slowly, over decades, society builds itself, society overcomes individualistic chaos. Society builds rules and institutions. The rules and institutions are more than a contract among previously-natural individuals to maximize freedom, although rules and institutions usually do create quite a bit of individual freedom. Rules and institutions are creative. They are organic, in that society is like a life form, institutions are the living parts of the living organism, and each institution depends on others. Institutions are good, and institutions lead to abundant life under the circumstances of the society. Sometimes particular individual actions do lead to a new development in social order, but individual actions rarely lead to wholly new order, and big individual actions, such as the rampage of Napoleon, often lead to grief. Rather, it is best for individuals to work through the rules and institutions of society and thus slowly to add more adaptations to what is already a good whole. Society does have a will and does give laws. In this way, society is indeed like the will of God and society indeed is creative. When we participate properly in society we participate properly in God.

These added versions (3B3, 3B4, and 3B5) are not true either. As with previous versions (3B1 and 3B2), they have a grain of truth, but, if you have to choose "true" or "false", choose "false". To take them at face value is highly appealing but too dangerous.

(3B6) The sixth version of the second form of the third myth (ugh!) is that Life always is good and always creative, and the proliferation of Life and of its creativity always is good. Life is the key category after God and Life is THE force, as in "Star Wars". Life is the ordering force of God on this Earth. It is like the Holy Spirit. Life represents God. The ordering force of Life represents God. Whatever represents Life, the ordering of Life, or the Creativity of Life, also represents God. Whatever represents God should also represent Life, promote Life, and promote Lifelike Creativity. Creative Life is what orders the chaos of mere matter into biology and what orders mere non-sentient species into sentient-moral-aesthetic beings (people). For many modern people now, from staunch supposedly traditional Christians to people who

are only dim heirs of the tradition, Creative Life has taken the place of the Holy Spirit and Creative Life is the face of God for most purposes. This idea of the importance of Life has roots before modern times but modern people give it their "spin" by linking it to ideas of society, freedom, order, and spontaneous order. Because Life and God are so basic, it is easy to state the other instances of all these myths of order as variations on Life but I avoided doing that here.

Life is the source of some chaos but, far more importantly, Life is the source of self-ordering good chaos. Yes, Life does produce some violence and bad things along the way but Life also produces goodness, good order, beauty, and good emotions, and those far outweigh the violence and badness. It is better to let Life entirely alone to "do its thing", and to put up with some of the inconvenience, than to try to guide Life into what we mere humans think is good and is good self-order. We can fight the bad things as they come up but we should never try to thwart the self-development of Life.

It is easy to see how this idea of Life stands with the idea of the People as the source of all good and the source of proper self-ordering good free society. Let the People do what they want. Simply tell them that they are free metaphysical Life-Beings, and good self-ordering society is sure to follow after a short time of chaotic revolt.

Life orders chaos. To have something to order, Life needs chaos. Because life orders chaos, it does not fully order chaos but only partially orders chaos. So, overall, Life is messy. Abundant life is abundantly messier. So the most Lively people are the messiest, most disorderly, loudest, rudest, least educated, most disrespectful of rules, most creative, and most artistic. That is where all great ideas and institutions come from ultimately. If any group is messy, disorderly, loud, etc., that group is the carrier of Life in our times and should be highly respected.

Although Creative Life orders chaos, and needs some chaos on which to do its creative work, it is wrong to think of chaos as before Life in terms of time, importance, realness, or status. If Creative Life is close to God, then Life is before chaos, more important than chaos, and has a higher and qualitatively different status than chaos. Chaos is merely the stuff on which Creative Life works. Chaos is not a big deal unto itself apart from Creative Life and God. Even so, modern confused people often give glamorized chaos an importance and status nearly equal to Creative Life itself.

For some people, Creativity (and thus Art) is on a par with Life and is pretty much the mark of God, even more so than Life. The universe is Creative even though it is not alive, art is creative even though it is not alive and even if it comes from life for now, and God can be creative even if all life on this planet and all other planets has gone extinct. Creativity is important in Romanticism. However, in nearly all cases for now, Life and Creativity are so mixed there is no point in trying to separate them. Take them together. In a similar way (but not identical), Love is part of the mix. Love cannot simply be the same as Creativity or Life, but it seems Life and Creativity aim ultimately at Love. Love guides Life and Creativity – even ugly art if it is the best art. Love cannot guide them in any way that is now clear in physics or biology, but it does so anyhow. Anything against Love is against Life and Creativity, and vice versa. They come in a set. When I say one, you should think of the others.

When people want to bolster their social, political, or economic cause, they get self-ordering spontaneous good Life on the side of their cause and put Death on the side of their enemies. This is why anti-abortion

crusaders speak in terms of "pro-Life" and paint the pro-Choice movement as pro-Death. In American ideology, especially, ironically, for the Right, "Choice" is good and on the side of Life. This is why the "allow abortion" side has taken up the identity of "Pro-Choice"; not only is it pro-Choice, it is also pro-Life. This is why, since about 1980, Roman Catholic theology has developed as a large idea the "Life Culture" of the Church versus the "Death Culture" of secular society. Every religious, ethnic, and gender group claims Life.

Planned economies such as national health care are too orderly to be of Life. The free capitalist market is disorderly but it is disorder that orders itself, so it must be of Life. If you support Life, support unbridled capitalism. Alternatives are all of Death. Big business is an intrinsic part free capitalism, and, these days, is the essential way the market expresses itself and works for the good of all. Anyone who fetters any size business fetters Life and so aids Death. By the way, as far as I can tell, the Roman Catholic Church includes unbridled capitalism and big business in the Death Culture.

It is easy to re-interpret the Big Bang, cosmology, and evolution in terms of good Life as emerging from chaos, as the self-ordering of chaos, and the culmination of self-ordering chaos. It is easy to see Nature in these terms. Cosmology and evolution are the means by which God orders chaos by leading chaos to self-order. By seeing this way, you can put the force of Cosmic History, Cosmic Chaos, and Cosmic Life behind ideologies. I avoided using cosmology and evolution to support overly strong ideas of life (Life) because that view is misleading, wrong, and, more often than not, bad.

Some Assessment.

Not every natural thing is good and not every good is simply natural. Sometimes you have to choose between natural and good. Likewise, good does not win just because it is good, through cosmic magic or through the magic of a system, however natural the cosmos and the system, or apparently god-given the cosmos and the system, no matter how much you love C.S. Lewis and Narnia, love rock or hip-hop, or love your religion, nationality, ethnic group, gender, occupation group, or socio-economic class. You have to figure out what is bad chaos, good chaos, proper good moderate order, and bad hyper-order. You have to figure out if good moderate order really is the best. You have to figure out what is the best order, where the best order comes from, and how to get there from here. You have to figure out what to avoid and how. This is what the first two chapters of the book were about.

Unfortunately for all the myths above, chaos does not always order itself; when chaos does order itself, the order is not always good; and tyranny cannot be undone simply by pointing out to people that they are metaphysical persons. Chaos is not always good and does not always lead to good. Chaos is not always creative, and, when it is creative, the creativity does not always lead to goodness; read Dickens' "A Tale of Two Cities". Usually creativity must subdue chaos to express its work. (In "A Tale", the old aristocrat falls back on the craft of shoemaking when good creative moderate order fails and when arises the bad hyper-order-and-chaos of the Revolution and arises the ever-knitting mechanical death-dealing artifice of Madame De Farge. In this case, the legal trade is a mere inadequate craft too. Mere craft is not enough, not even intellectual craft.)

Life did originate from self-ordering semi-chaos but that does not make Life a metaphysical category and a metaphysical Force. It does not make all life good and all things that come from life good. It does not

mean we should put up with everything. Infections, malaria, plague, cancer, and rudeness are all of Life, just as much as are humans, but they are not good, and we should not put up with them. Evil tyranny is from Life as much as good democracy is from Life, and we should not put up with it. Sometimes we have to choose, even among what is living and natural. Most life is good, and we should cherish life, but we betray life when we have to make it a metaphysical category in order to cherish it.

The noisy, rude, selfish, dirty, racist, bigoted people of all colors, religions, and genders are alive but they are not thereby automatically good and they are not thereby automatically the source of all progress and goodness in society. They are not automatically the best source of creativity and art. In fact, not all art and creativity is on the side of Life and good. So, even when they do create, their works do not always help Life and good.

The people are not "The People". They are not one thing. They are many groups, and the groups do not always get along. They do not have mystic unity. They do not have a secret deep fund of wisdom and knowledge. They are not always right. They do not always know better than intellectuals and scientists. The mistakes of the majority are why the founders gave the United States representative democracy rather than simple populist democracy, set up checks and balances, and insisted on a Bill of Rights. Simply giving people apparent freedom does not insure they will develop democracy or good democracy. People need to be educated and prepared. People need proper institutions as background, including the right attitudes and culture.

The people can be duped. This sad fact does not mean rebels and social outsiders always know better than the people when the people are duped. Rebels and outsiders are fooled as often as the people, and they fool themselves with clever ideologies. Rebels and social outsiders do not often lead the people to good democracy. Rebels and social outsiders are not the magic source of goodness, life, and creativity. They are not modern day David and modern day prophets.

Society is not always the best solution, the best moderate good order between bad chaos and bad hyper-order. Society is not always the long accumulation of beneficial compromises that lead to good moderate order in their time and that collectively sustain the best moderate order now. Sometimes old institutions once were good but now are behind the times and thus comparatively bad. Sometimes small groups of individuals have to band together to change society. Changing society quickly and forcefully often does lead to more bad than good.

The fact that rapid change usually is bad does not mean society should never change, all change is bad, only Conservatives can tell between good and bad change, and only Conservatives can implement good change. Conservatives are not automatically aware of the proper balance between chaos and hyper-order. Conservatives are not automatically on the side of God and so on the side of creativity, goodness, life, abundance, and proper order. When lords had power, Conservatives used Conservative ideas to justify aristocracy; when capitalist came into power, Conservatives used Conservative ideas to justify big business. Conservatives have never been clear about what they wish to keep (conserve) as good and as the will of God, and so choose what suits power on that basis. Instead, they choose what serves power and then claim it is Conservative. They worship power as their Golden Calf, using society as its clothing. Moderate order between populist chaos and hyper-order tyranny is better than the extremes but it is not easy to find this useful compromise; it does not appear magically in Conservative rhetoric. Nor does this

useful middle order does not appear magically by itself. The good middle order is hard to hold when we do find it, and easy to lose.

Society does not have a simple clear General Will. The will of society is not like the will of God; and living properly in society is not often exactly like living with God.

The TV series "Family Guy" has an episode in which Baby "Stewie" and the dog Brian join the Army and go to Iraq. Scenes show what happens when American style democracy comes to Iraq. Scenes that begin as typically Iraqi morph automatically into what Americans wrongly think of when they think of the good democratic life. In one scene, a group of fully-veiled-and-fully-dressed modest Iraqi women at work in the house become a group of young women washing cars outdoors, dressed in bikinis, on full display, squirting each other with hoses so that they are effectively naked, kissing each other, and loving it all. The episode not only satirizes American belief that all things American are better and that our better-ness arises out of limitless freedom. It also satirizes the conservative, often Muslim, belief that any democracy, and any liberty for women, is a slippery slope inevitably down to chaos and evil - so it is better to impose rigid hyper-order dominated by men, and to impose it by any means necessary. The episode does not offer a balanced livable middle, but neither have our politicians and religious leaders.

We will meet these ideas again later in the book, as in the chapters on Romanticism and Decency. I do not usually refer back to here when they come up again.

It can seem a long way from myths in the Tanakh to ideas about economics, politics, and rebels. Not only does the Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition have myths about chaos but so do other cultures, and thus the ideas that I described as coming out of this tradition are not necessarily tightly linked to this tradition. This warning is true but it does not invalidate what I said. Important are: conflicts between chaos, some order, hyper-order; some ordering principle; self-ordering; God; life; creativity; good; and society. The fact that other cultures have ideas about chaos and order without necessarily getting them from the Tanakh only means other cultures can assimilate in their own ways Western developments of myths about chaos and order that began in the Tanakh, such as myths about economics, rebels, society, Conservatives, and self-creating. In any case, I don't defend my story because that would take too long. The rest of the book is partly a defense of my thinking, and you can judge while reading.

PART 5: Rebel and Remnant from the Tanakh (Old Testament).

Rebel.

David is a prototype rebel. I do not tell the story of David in any detail; find it on the Internet and read it in the Tanakh. For a few more details, see the section below on the Remnant.

Around 1050 BCE (BC), the Hebrews asked their prophets to ask God if they could have a first king. God advised them against it, saying it would lead to trouble. But the people persisted, and finally God granted them a first king, Saul. As God said, Saul's reign was a long string of troubles, the biggest of which was that the enemy of the Hebrews, the Philistines, often invaded and defeated the Hebrews. Rather than represent good moderate order, Saul's reign represented the resurgence of hyper-order (unneeded king)

and chaos (Philistines and war). The Bible blames Saul personally but that account likely is an excuse written later by the descendants of the man who replaced Saul.

Saul had bad headaches, likely migraines. Saul hired a young musician, David, to play, sing, and soothe Saul's aching head. Besides musician, David was a daring smart warrior and ambitious. Saul saw in David a rival, and tried to kill him. David escaped and became a guerilla. He was cunning, treacherous, and successful. He was from humble origins, a true "man of the people". Men came to him from Saul. His followers loved him. After years of guerilla war, David killed Saul and took the throne. David routed the enemies of the Hebrews, murdered own rivals including some former allies, took Jerusalem from its native people, and set up the Kingdom of Israel. The messiah of Jewish lore is supposed to come from the house of David. Christians claim David as an ancestor of Jesus.

Likely David did not write all the Psalms, songs about religion and politics, but he still gets credit. The people loved David for his songs and his dancing. David was a successful Creative Artist.

David also was a womanizer, and he murdered the husband of a woman that he wanted. He was not a "family values" guy. Because of his moral failings, at the end of his life David was estranged from God, he felt cold and miserable, he was sexually impotent, and his family life was miserable. His own strong order as king, powerful man, artist, and seducer was not enough without the right order of God. David's strong order created chaos, as when his best son, Absalom, tried to take the throne while David lived, and his other children fought after David died. After their own teenage rebellion, modern parents tell their children this misery is what happens to all rebels. Later Israelites worked to gain the right order of God rather than merely the orders of war, chaos, strongman, king, priest, power, wealth, and lust.

As a successful rebel, creative living being, musician, and dancer, David is a big precursor to Romantic musician rebels of the 1800s, many "young men with a horn" in jazz, rock rebels with a message, hip-hop angry "gangsta" rebels, and people who think they should make it just because there are cool at dancing and singing but with no marketable skills. David was the prototype for Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, John Lennon, David Bowie, Bruce Springsteen, Kurt Cobain, "Grrl" groups of the 1990s, Joni Mitchell, Sheryl Crow, all the women of Lilith Fair, and most rockers. I don't know hip-hop (rap) well enough to say who is like David. Thankfully the "big names" often have better morals than David.

People use the story of David, usually unconsciously, to justify a rebel pose, and to glamorize artists as the tools of God, God's creativity, and the new superior social order. Despite that David was a usurper, murder, seducer, and the ruin of families, Jews and Christians still love him. They love him because he was a successful artist and rebel, and he was a lowly man of the people. His story works with the idea that (1) God uses chaos to create a system in which (2) good wins through the system and that (3) God dislikes hyper-order and tyranny. Parents, teachers, authority figures, and right wingers wrongly think that the modern attitude esteeming rebels is entirely modern and is a result of bad modern ideologies. Modern ideologies, bad or good, do contribute to the idea of a rebel and do allow people to sustain the pose of a rebel even when there is little to rebel against or when the pose of a rebel does no good. But modern ideologues did not invent the pose and its myth. David the rebel was an agent of God. In his time, only a rebel could have acted as the agent of God. So, if you want to be an agent of God, be a rebel. If you want to feel justified, be a rebel. If you can't be a real rebel, pose. In loving David, the Judeo-Christian, and now Muslim, tradition lays a solid foundation for excusing, enabling, justifying, and

glamorizing rebels, especially if they are tied into popular culture. How this stance plays out is left to later chapters. The myth of the rebel used as justification for an attitude is not confined to the Left but plagues the Right just as much. There we find it in images of the business entrepreneur as innovator and pioneer, the Tea Party as rebels, and anti-abortion activists as rebels against a decadent dominant Saul-like Left. Donald Trump became President almost entirely by using the myths of rebel, businessman as leader of the Remnant, and businessman as the agent of good's (God's) victory.

The true problem here is not that rebels have no real grievances but that they waste their energy on the wrong issues, wrong methods, and on poses. We need them to rebel over the right things and to use the right methods for real problems. As long as rebellion is led by this wrong myth and poor understanding of human nature, democracy, and capitalism, then rebels will use wrong methods for wrong problems, and so do little good. Often they help the power structure and the chaos that they wish to defeat.

Remnant.

The story-and-myth of the Remnant is best exemplified by the story of the "Captivity" of some Israelites in Babylon. You can find details on the Internet by searching "Babylonian Captivity". I retell this story in a later chapter when it is needed there.

Moses likely lived in the range 1600 BCE (BC) to 1300 BCE, mostly likely in the range 1380 to 1300. In the period from about Moses to about 1050 BCE, a group called "Hebrews" took over most of what is now the state of Israel, including Judea, the "West Bank", Samaria, Galilee, and some of the Golan. Then, all that land was called "Canaan". The Hebrews felt God had promised them this land. When the Hebrews settled Canaan, they became "Israelites". At first, there was no state of Israel anymore than there was a state of grunge rockers in the 1990s. The first king of the Israelites was Saul. David took the throne from Saul about 1030 to 1010 BCE; took Jerusalem from the original owners; and set up the capital of Israel at Jerusalem. That is about when the state of Israel began. A big Temple goes along with central authority in the King and priests. So, David began work on the Temple in Jerusalem and his son Solomon finished it after 1000 BCE.

Israel had two major divisions: (1) Northern Israel, also called "Israel" by itself; and (2) Southern Israel, also called "Judea", after the major group of Israelites who lived there, the "tribe" of Judah. A Jew was a member of Judah, a resident of Judea, a person within the sway of Judea, or now, a person who follows the religion typical of the Jews after the events related below, or a person who is born to Jews whether or not he-she follows the religion. Citizens of the modern state of Israel are called "Israelis" but I don't refer to them here. Most Israelites, especially Northern Israelites, worshipped God, El-Yahweh, in "high places", hills and mountains, the most important of which was Shiloh in the North. Judeans, Jews, worshipped El-Yahweh in the Temple at Jerusalem. Eventually all Israelites were called "Jews" because Judea and Jews dominated the whole of Israel. Here the term "Israel" refers to combined Northern and Southern Israel unless qualified. The peak of power for Israel came after David, with Solomon and the next generations of kings, around 980 to 850 BCE. Then, Israel controlled a territory larger than Canaan - but likely the larger territory was not considered part of God-given Israel, the Promised Land.

Northern and Southern Israel were never on perfect terms, for reasons I don't go into here. The disputes were argued in terms of religious differences. Non-Jewish Israelites, the people of Israel of the North,

said they could worship God at Shiloh and other "high places" while Jews in Judea in the South insisted the only true place to worship God was the Temple at Jerusalem. Each accused the other of falling from the original religion of El-Yahweh and of carrying on wrong practices that made El-Yahweh angry with the entire state of Israel.

Beginning in the 700s BCE, the rising state of Assyria harassed Israel and whittled away its power and land. Israelites blamed their decline on their lack of strict adherence to God's Law, and Israelites saw the Assyrians as God's instrument of punishment. A similar attitude still prevails among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, at least: if we are lax or do wrong, God will punish us by giving us domestic problems, and letting strangers immigrate, defeat us economically, or defeat us in conflict. On the other hand, if we are strict in observance and worship, God will punish our enemies and reward us with power, prosperity, land, and good commerce.

By 700 BCE, Assyria had invaded, conquered, and pretty much destroyed Northern Israel, or "Israel", but left Judea intact, and took Judea as a subject state. After that, some customs of the North were not what we now think of as typically Jewish: the South had ideas and practices that the North did not; and vice versa. In particular, the areas used a slightly different ritual calendar. Details are not important here but will be if you read more. It is not clear if Northerners continued their distinct traditions after the Assyrian invasions or if their traditions changed greatly due. Part of the North became Galilee, where Jesus was from, and part of the North became Samaria, which had a bad name for religious decadence (likely not deserved) even into the time of Jesus.

Babylon (Iraq) conquered Assyria and took over Northern Israel. In 587 BCE, Babylon entered Judah but did not devastate it, instead leaving it a vassal. Babylon took many people to the city of Babylon, likely educated and skilled people such as scribes and artisans. It is not clear how many people but likely at least 10,000. It is not clear where the captives came from but likely Jerusalem. Among them were priests of the Temple and Palace. This is the famous "Babylonian Captivity". Listen to Bob Marley.

In about 540 BCE, Medes and Persians conquered Babylon, and allowed captive Jews to return to Judea in 538 BCE. The returning captives took over the city of Jerusalem and the governing of Judea. In effect, after that, Judea was all of Israel. The North was no more part of Israel. All Hebrews and Israelites had become Jews, or, more aptly, Jews had come to be all of Israel. The returning people rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem around 520 BCE. The rebuild took several decades so an exact date is not useful here.

The priest Nathan led the people who returned, in religion, politics, and military affairs. The returned exiles had clear ideas about what Jewish life should be and how the Jewish state should run. With help from Persia, they imposed their ideas on Judea, at least officially. Officially, they punished transgressors harshly. They looked down on the people who had remained, especially on peasants, whom they called mere "people of the land". It was not clear how much the returning exiles really could change the daily life of average people. They were angry at most of the Jews who had remained behind. They explained the fall of Israel and their anger by saying that all Jews had been, and usually still were, lax in their worship of El-Yahweh. Jewish men married foreign women, allowed wives to worship foreign gods, and allowed children to follow foreign mothers in worship. Even worse, Jewish men worshipped foreign gods along with their wives. Backed by the Persians, the people who returned imposed a strict order and clung strictly to the Laws of El-Yahweh as seen by their priests. The people who returned chose a few from the

Jews that had remained as having held closest to the Laws of God. These select remaining people got positions and power in the new political and religious order. Most practices that later became Judaism had their basis in that time including worship at the Temple only, ideas about the Sabbath, the calendar, purity, and about family life and personal life.

For the needs of this chapter, the people who returned, together with the few who had remained that were designated as pure enough by the returnees, are the "Remnant".

It is not clear how much the ideas of the Remnant were really from the past and how much their ideas were current at the time; how much their ideas were about how things should be in their present, to suit them; and how much they used vague ideas about an unreal idealized past as a rationale. I suspect a big chunk of ideas were borrowed from Babylon and Persia, the ideas served to bolster the Remnant, the ideas were kept for that reason, and the ideas and the Remnant were justified by referring to an idealized unreal imaginary past. After the captives returned, Judah did not flourish as in the time of Solomon but it did do better after the Remnant imposed their order. The Remnant and their followers credited their new strict worship, and the returning favor of El-Yahweh, for the better life.

Without details: In 330 BCE, Alexander the Great conquered Persia, and took the North, Judea, and all the local area. Over a span around 150 BCE, Rome conquered the Greeks. Rome allowed local rule by aristocrats. Herod and his family rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem, around the time of Jesus, into one of the greatest structures in the Roman Empire. During the time of Jesus, Rome ruled what had been the North (Israel) and was then Galilee and Samaria, with on-again off-again co-rule by Jews of parts of the North. Jews did not think of Galilee and Samaria as part of Judea or Israel; they seemed to exclude the North from the tradition of El-Yahweh. I don't know what Galileans and Samaritans thought; some did go to the Temple in Jerusalem for holy days and formal worship. Rome severely punished Jerusalem in 70 CE (AD), trying to destroy it as the center of Jewish life. About 125 CE, Rome destroyed the Jewish holy places in Jerusalem and expelled all Jews from Judea. Judea-Israel ceased as a state and a homeland for Jews. What happened to people of the North has never been clear. Jewish religious leaders, often Pharisees but not always, developed ideas about worship, family life, social life, and relations with non-Jews among a people that had once insisted on a homeland, Temple, king, and state but no longer had them. Early Jewish-Christian relations should be seen in the light of striving to maintain a Jewish identity. The ideas of Jewish religious leaders sustained Jews for 1900 years. So it remained until 1948 with the coming of the modern state of Israel.

Some Jews and Christians see the 1900 years without a Jewish state as another Babylonian Captivity, this time for all Jews, and see the return of the Jewish state as another return of the Remnant. I don't know what ratio of Jews and Christians see it this way. If this way is true, I don't know what that means for the role of Jews and Christians in the world and for how God sees us. Jews are not re-ordering the world now as some Jews re-ordered Judea-Israel when they returned from Babylon. Maybe we should expect from Jews not that kind of re-ordering but solid citizenship in modern states and contributions to commerce, science, medicine, and the arts. Jews might not serve as the role model for the world but might serve as one of the better role models. We seem to be getting that.

(If you care about these issues, you have to decide: who are the true Hebrews, true Israelites, and true Jews; who are the true followers of El-Yahweh (God and Allah) and his prophets; what is the true way to

worship; where is the true place to worship, if any particular place to worship is needed; whether Galilee and its people, including Jesus, should have been part of greater Israel-Judea; whether Samaria and its people should have been part of greater Israel-Judea; what rights Jews have to their old homeland of Judea; what rights Jews have to the traditional land of Israel that included both the North-Israel and Judea-Israel; whether Jews have rights only to Judea; and what rights people have who lived in Canaan after Jews, for 2000 years, sometimes Palestinians but not only them. Listen to authorities but think for yourself. Avoid bias. Good luck.)

You don't have to be a Jew, Christian, or Muslim to take the pose of the Remnant. Any group that is unhappy or that wants more takes the pose of the Remnant. It claims to be the only group that has continuous ties with God, it knows his mind best, knows what he wants, knows what order he wants, and it has a right to compel others. It is holier than other groups (than thou). It uses an imagined better time-and-place as justification. Think of Republicans when Reagan wanted to return to a Golden Age before Social Security and to make America a shining city on the hill for the whole world, and think of Trump's "Make America Great AGAIN". It works. People buy it. Democrats refer to the times of Roosevelt and Kennedy. Blacks use King and the 1950s-1960s fight.

To Christians, although Jesus is only one person and not a group, Jesus is the true "people" who came back from Babylon and he is the true remnant who stayed faithful in Israel. He is the true Remnant who brings all people back to God. He is Remnant and faithfulness embodied. The returnees from Babylon and the people who remained faithful in Israel only foreshadow the true faithfulness of Jesus. Jesus, his disciples, followers, and eventually his Church, are the true people who return from the captivity of not-yet-truly-knowing-God and the true people who remained-faithful-to-God-as-best-they-could-and-so-were-always-open-to-his-call-and-Grace. They are the true Remnant under the kingship of Jesus. They are the worldly fleshly embodiment of the ideal spiritual of faithful Remnant, the proper worldly mix of flesh and spirit. All others prior to Jesus only foreshadow at best. Any group now that claims to be a Remnant can do so only partially and derivatively from Jesus and his Church. Any group that does not accept the prior perfection of Jesus and his Church as ideal Remnant risks the sin of Pride, risks deluding followers, and risks causing badness. Your group can claim to be a politically active remnant but if you don't see the prior greater role of Jesus and his church, you do so only at risk. If you think this stance is extreme in the case of Christianity, ALL religions exalt their leaders about as much. This is a case where you have to assess ideas. Please keep this stance in mind for comments below using J.R.R. Tolkien.

Rebel and Remnant at the Same Time.

It might seem that the idea of a Remnant is almost exclusively the property of the right wing. They use it to complain about the world, to yearn for an imagined golden past strictly ordered by rigid rules of their religion, use it to blame others, and to control others. It might seem that ideas of Remnant and rebel are mutually exclusive. Neither of these restrictions is true. People are more clever. Both the left and right make up ideas about the past and what God really wants so they can claim to be a Remnant. They want to remake the present more in line with their ideas of God's ideal, and they would not wish to do so unless other people who are not-so-godly have power, so they also are rebels. Even if their ideas are new, they say their ideas are more in line with God as shown in the past.

The story of the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt can be seen as both a story of a rebel (Moses) and of a Remnant (Hebrews) that returns to about where their Father (Abraham) originated.

I have always been amazed by how much people will buy into various odd assortments of these myths so people can feel good about themselves by adopting a mythological role. I find entertaining the rock-and-roll rebel as David returning us to the age of tribal equality and the Conservative rebel slaying dragons of the decadent left and so restoring the golden family and golden state that never were.

I like the myths, and have used them, but I also "see through" them and take them with salt. I use them to help thinking, not control it. If I act too much like a character in a myth, I stop myself.

In "The Lord of the Rings" and other material from his "Middle Earth" sagas, J.R.R. Tolkien tells the story of the Remnant twice and mixes it with motifs from the myth of the rebel. His parallels with the Bible are deliberate. Part of the success of LOTR is an unconscious appeal to of myths that have become a part of our culture and are a driving force in our culture and politics. If you are bored of "The Rings", then skip the paragraphs between the marks "LOTR".

Begin LOTR. (Remnant1) God sung his plan for the world, Middle Earth, to the angels. Morgoth was one of the highest angels. Morgoth offered an alternative song (plan of order). God rejected Morgoth's song and God sang Middle Earth into being. Singing matters. Morgoth rebelled and took Middle Earth. Some angels followed God while some followed Morgoth. Morgoth waged war on the various native peoples of Middle Earth and the high elves that had come from heaven to fight Morgoth. Sauron was an angel, of next-to-highest rank. He followed Morgoth as captain of forces, and led the war. Eventually God sent a high angel to chase Morgoth from Middle Earth. I leave out features that support my case but take too much space such as the elves as Remnant and how Morgoth corrupts through false imitation.

Sauron want back to heaven for a while but then he returned to Middle Earth. Sauron bided his time and feigned being good. He forged the One Ring of Power. Using it, Sauron conquered much of Middle Earth except for some areas held by elves and a big island to the west, Numenor.

After Morgoth left, many of the best men of Middle Earth went to Numenor where they cultivated science and the arts including what seemed like magic. Numenor became the greatest society on Middle Earth, like Egypt in its time, like Atlantis of fable, stronger than Sauron and his armies on the mainland even when Sauron had the Ring. In the movies, the "seeing stones" or "palantiri" originally were inventions of Numenor, as was the tower where Saruman lived (Orthanc), and were not evil.

Rather than fight directly with Numenor, Sauron corrupted it from within with lies. Through Sauron's conniving, Numenor rejected God, and so fell, much as Egypt rejected God when God asked Egypt to release the Hebrews. All through their history, the Israelites never felt they were conquered by external enemies so much as they defeated themselves by internal corruption, especially by following the idols of their spouses and neighbors.

Despite Sauron's corruption, a few Numenoreans clung to the ways of God. In their land, in their times, they were rebels. They escaped the destruction of the island. They returned east to the mainland, where they began a great kingdom, with a northern part, Arnor, and southern part, Gondor. Their path parallels

the Hebrews out of Egypt when Moses and Joshua defeated the tribes in the Holy Land, took the Holy Land for the Hebrews and for God, and founded Greater Israel, which consisted of lesser Israel in the North (Samaria and Galilee) and Judea in the South. The Remnant people of Numenor, in Gondor and Arnor, joined with the elves, and together they defeated Sauron, as Joshua and the next generation of fighters defeated Jericho and the local powers to fix control of Canaan.

When Sauron was defeated, Isildur, the intended heir of Gondor, took Sauron's One Ring but did not destroy it. As long as the Ring remains, Sauron cannot die and, with it, he can regain power. When Isildur was murdered, the Ring fell into the River Anduin, where it waited for Sauron. These last scenes are shown in the movies of "The Lord of the Rings".

(Remnant 2) The second version of the Remnant is the main story of "The Lord of the Rings" from books and movies. The story picks up after the combined forces of the first Remnant from Numenor and the elves defeat Sauron but Isildur does not destroy the Ring. The faithful-to-God Numenoreans who had survived the fall of Numenor were the stock for the line of true kings in Middle Earth. The story of Arnor and Gondor reflects the story of lesser Israel in the north and Judea in the south. As with Jerusalem, the "City on the Hill", the capital of Gondor in the south is a shining city on a hill.

Sauron, without revealing himself, by using the Chief of the Nine Nazgul (Ring Wraths), destroyed Arnor, Kingdom of the North, as Assyria destroyed Israel in the North. The end of Arnor stunned Gondor and led to disarray just as in Judea after the North fell to Assyria. The line of true kings in the South had been lost with the death of Isildur. So, to most men, for a long time, it seemed there was no true king of Arnor-Gondor, just as it appeared there was no true king in Israel-Judea after the line of David faltered in the South. Rather, Gondor was ruled by stewards just as Judea was ruled by local aristocrats not of the true full line of David.

Luckily, the line of true kings in Middle Earth was kept in the North, although Arnor had fallen, as Jesus the true king, heir of David, came from Galilee in the North although Israel in the north had fallen. At the time of the events told in the books and movies, the true king of the two kingdoms was Aragorn, although only elves and the human Remnant in the north knew so, just as only close followers of Jesus knew he was the one true king and one true Remnant of God. Not quite a rebel, still Aragorn is a person on the fringes, looks disreputable, and knows much lore. He does not take on the airs of a king but mingles with the common people and works endlessly to keep them safe. He consorts with other disreputable people on the fringes such as Gandalf. All this is true of Jesus too. Jesus was not a rebel, not even to the extent that David was, but to the authorities of his time, he was a rebel, he did some rebellious things such as chase the money changers out of the Temple courtyard, and officially he was executed for treason while really he was executed simply for potentially causing trouble.

Helpers of the one true king of Middle Earth, humble folk, hobbits, came from the North just as disciples of Jesus were humble folk from the North. Before becoming heroes, Merry and Pippin were rascals and even thieves, about as close to rebels as hobbits can get. The true King of Middle Earth, Aragorn, and true leaders of the hobbits, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, unite Arnor and Gondor and save the world, just as Jesus, in theory, united all Israelites, and used his disciples, especially Peter and Paul, to save the world. Although Jesus was of the North, he did most of his work in the South. Although Aragorn, Frodo,

and Sam were of the North, they did their best work in the South. When the hobbits returned home, they were not treated as heroes but as disreputable characters on the fringes.

Sauron had a lot of comebacks. His followers had a lot of comebacks. In this, Sauron was an imitation false leader of an imitation false Remnant, was a false Remnant, and his followers were a false Remnant. This is the case with many groups and leaders that claim to be a Remnant. End LOTR.

The idea (myth) of a Remnant requires enemies, violence, and the violent defeat of enemies, not only in Tolkien's version but in the common version inherited by many ethnic groups from the Bible. Good wins, partially because it is good, but largely because big strong violent and-or clever people take up arms. The idea of a Remnant requires the ideas that good is defeated largely by corruption from within, many problems have their roots in not-enough-purity, and most people don't see corruption from within, so an effective Remnant has to be pure, has to see what others don't, and has to be willing to strongly urge purity on the rest of society. The idea of the Remnant is a way to mix old and new, to be new but present yourself as old and new.

Even political parties that have been in power a long time can see themselves as a Remnant if they are not the majority and they feel themselves in danger from a misguided public. Examples are Communist parties and parties of the rich. If their policies keep the public modestly unquiet, as usually happens, then a feedback cycle can develop, and bolster their identity as a Remnant.

Conservatives in America like to pose as a mix of rebel and Remnant. Every time Conservatives "come back" after Liberals have had power for a while, they act as rebels fighting against the near-Stalinism that self-deluded Liberals always lead America to the brink of. Then, when Conservatives have power, they portray themselves as the Remnant back from power exile, set hard on the task of restoring God's order after the chaos of Liberal rule. They tell themselves they are the minority smart guys leading an unquiet public to a better life despite the fact that the public would not like their policies if it understood the reality of the policies. Voters buy it often enough.

Liberals also want to show themselves as rebels and Remnant but they are not as adept. They can sell the rebel role because it is easy to portray Conservatives as hyper-order even when Conservatives cause chaos such as the housing crisis of 2007. It is harder for Liberals to portray themselves as the Remnant because it is hard to see them as once having been legitimate, more orderly than Conservatives, then wrongly kicked, out. and now coming back to restore God's order. If they cast themselves as humanistic have-a-heart order that is good for society as whole, they do better as Remnant. If they cast themselves as the heirs of Thomas Jefferson back to restore social justice, they do better as Remnant.

Living in Alabama, the American "Deep South", I have many chances to see church on television. White preachers do not dwell on these themes much except as the preachers see conservative Southern virtue in conflict with northern bad liberal hyper-order or degenerate Liberal moral chaos. Southern Whites are the true Christian Remnant saving us from the disorder of Yankee Liberalism. And Southern Whites continue the tradition of the Southern Rebel.

Black preachers dwell heavily on the Remnant. They return often to the ideas that Black people are like the Jews in exile in Babylon, are badly mistreated by all the people around them who are all unlike them,

and yearn for home. Home cannot be Africa but instead is their proper due place in America. God will restore them to their proper home in America, to their rightful political and economic place as befits their moral superiority and their unrecognized economic contributions. Martin Luther King was both THE rebel and the greatest original leader of the Remnant. Black leaders refer to the classic Civil Rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s as the imagined ideal past to which the Remnant, them, holds the key and from which they derive inspiration and methods. In their minds, and at odds with the facts, the issues have not changed since 1950, and so the same exact struggle is just as much a road to justification. At least since 2000, since I have lived here, Black preachers have also called for leaders who are rebels like David, like what Jesse Jackson presents. Sadly, that image has been thoroughly mixed with bitterness. That mix is what Al Sharpton puts on, many Black music and pop culture people put on, and far too many bitter Black people put on.

More on the American Version.

Because the American version of these stories has been spreading around the world through pop media, it is useful to look at it again briefly. I do not explain why Americans think as they do. I return to these themes in the chapter on Romanticism.

As far as I can tell, Americans are the best example of a culture-society which does not contrast good order with chaos but contrasts good order with hyper-order. The badness of hyper-order is worse than any badness of chaos. Hyper-order is always bad. The worst badness comes from hyper-order. True badness can come only from hyper-order. When Americans think of badness and bad societies, they think of fascist Europe, Stalinist Russia, and North Korea. When Americans think of improving society, they think of improving hyper-ordered societies so as to make them less hyper-ordered and freer. That freedom always leads automatically to better moderate order.

In the American view, chaos is not necessarily bad and can be good, even quite good. Chaos is similar to freedom both for individuals and societies. Groups that can present themselves as a bit chaotic can come across as free and good even when they are really bound by strict rules, such as motorcycle gangs and the mafia. Without chaos, there would be no creativity, creativity is always good. Creativity not only needs some prior chaos but also often makes chaos. That more chaos then leads to more creativity, and so on. Art is good creativity. Art requires some order (the media and the genre) and it imposes further order (the artistic vision of a particular world) but true real deep art springs from nowhere, and good artists are always a bit eccentric and chaotic, so art is more akin to chaos than to hyper-order, and true art is always good. Without good chaos there would be no creative art.

Like everyone, Americans assume their order is the good moderate order, but Americans do not often speak about their order as good moderate order. They prefer to think of it as no order, even if it is not chaos. It is the order that comes of spontaneity and naturalness. It is nature and spontaneity as order. It is true that the founders of the country wrote of good moderate order but they also recognized the need for continual revision and for spontaneity, and that trend won out.

Americans are suspicious of anything that self-consciously calls itself "order", "good order", or even "good moderate order". Americans do not deny the goodness of moderate order but they suspect that anything calling itself good moderate order is not good moderate order but is hyper-order oppression calling itself

good moderate order as a way to sneak up on us and get us. When faced with a choice between an order that calls itself good moderate order versus chaos with maybe some potential harm, it is still better to choose chaos.

Live the untamed free life. It is more artistic and creative, and therefore more satisfying.

Over time, what was once new good moderate order tends to become old established bad hyper-order. Then, the system has to get shaken, and chaos has to prevail for a while. Out of the chaos will come a new better good moderate order.

It is not hard to see where rebels fit in. Rebels don't accept hyper-order and don't even accept moderate order. They are the leaders in the shake up that ends the old order, allows brief chaos, and brings in the new good moderate order. Thomas Jefferson is notorious in his time for saying that a good democracy needed a revolution every generation.

Of course, true rebels don't fit into moderate order either, and they have a certain personality type, but that is alright. They are useful even in good moderate order for keeping people on their toes. Better to be a rebel just in case good moderate order turns into bad hyper-order than to be a complacent sheep who helps good moderate order turn into bad hyper-order.

The Plight of the Reasonable Person and the Conservative.

Chaos and rebellion can be fun, but we should not romanticize chaos or rebellion. We do need some kind of order. Moderate order is more likely to be good than chaos, rebellion, hyper-order, or blind faith obedience. The West is lucky to have been given an excellent set of tools to find good moderate order. Hopefully we use them well.

At least since about 1920, Americans have dismissed much Conservative argument as special pleading for hyper-order, the rich, the powerful, their lackeys, and other fascists-in-the-making. Most modern conservative thinking is apologetics. But not all conservative thinking is that. In dismissing all of it, we miss good points about moderate order, chaos, and hyper-order. Believe it or not, some conservatives know that moderate order is best and they seek moderate order. Some conservatives fear hyper-order and seek to avoid it. The difference is that conservatives think hyper-order is more likely to come from leftist-induced chaos than from moderate order. They have in mind the French Revolution, Russia from about 1850 onwards, and Germany after World War Two. In those cases, they are correct. Chaos did not lead to natural spontaneous good moderate order but to horrible tyranny. Conservatives fear that America is becoming like France just before 1789. They have some justification for their fears.

It is not clear that those cases of tyranny from leftist-induced chaos apply to America. It is not clear if America is more in danger of falling into bad hyper-order, that is, into mom-and-apple-pie fascism, from leftist-induced chaos, Liberal-induced political correctness, middle class soccer culture, Republican aid for business and the military industrial complex, Tea Party backlash, "thug culture" among any ethnic group, or from generalized fear as we move into the world economy. We are in danger from all the sources, and we need better ideas to avoid danger and do what is best.

I do not argue the case here. I only say we need to look at all reasonable arguments, and at least a few facts, before we give in to myth or propaganda. We need to use our minds to find good moderate order. Do not fear modest chaos or moderate order. Fear badness in any kind of order.

The Victory of Good, and other Myths, Again.

Above I said that most people want good to win just because it is good, and one way to do so is for good to win as the result of a system. I also said this way avoids thinking about good, the system, your role in serving good, and your role in a system. If you do moderately well, and if your group does well, then you can say that the system is doing the work, and you have the right to get on with getting as much as you can. Or, if you and your group are not doing well, then you say your group should be the one that orders the system of the best moderate order and the greatest victory for the most good. You are the rebels and remnant, and should be doing the ordering. All this is what the myths of good moderate order arising from chaos or from a reaction against hyper-order enable. I hope this critique of the myths and them groups that use them is clear enough so that I don't have to go through it. I don't assess any particular claims here.

The myths of goodness winning because it is good, good coming out of a system, and the system being ordered for the best by particular guiding groups, are not realistic enough. We have to do better. We have to step back from the myths and think for ourselves. Because most of us rely on these ideas too much, then, at least sometime in our lives, we have to repudiate the ideas for a while until we can think better. If we don't, then good will not win because it is good, good will not win because it has the right champions, good will not win because a system produces good, good will not win because it arises from chaos in moderate order, and good will not win because it arises from a revolt against hyper-order. Good will lose. Don't depend on divine intervention.

As with other ideas that come to evolved beings, we should judge myths not just because they are myths but on the basis of their truth and their usefulness. Fun is part of usefulness. I don't want to get rid of all myths. I love myths. As evolved humans, we have to think through myths at least somewhat, we cannot get rid of myths, and we should not try. Rather, we should learn to do two things. First, put aside myths temporarily to think in terms of boring objective reality. Second, learn to think through myths to better truth. The two methods depend on each other. You can only learn to put aside myths for a while if you can learn to think through them "to the other side". You can only learn to shrug off the bad myths of other people if you can learn to think in good myths for yourself. Maybe Donald Trump really is the rebel savior businessman who will lead God's remnant of middle and working class America back to God's great order again. Or maybe you should stop thinking in those terms for a while, start thinking in terms of reality, and, after another while, look for the right inspiration and right inspirational leader.

Recall the myths around Jesus. He came from the chaotic lower classes, the people, the repository of all wisdom and good. He ordered that chaos into a movement that changed the whole world. He tried to get around the hyper-order of the rich, Jewish leaders, the official Jewish Church, and the Romans. He was a rebel in his way. He represented the remnant of the people who truly knew God and who worshipped God in the right way. His life, death, and resurrection led to the victory of good because it is good and not because it is strong. His life, death, and resurrection led to the correct system of moderate order, the system that assures the victory of good because it is good, and the system that assures the greatest

good, that is, the Church – at least for some people with the right mix of membership, grace, works, faith, and Justification. The Church properly orders both chaos and hyper-order. In that way, as the heirs of Jesus, the Church does the proper creative life-giving ordering work of God.

We should not reject Jesus or his teachings just because people see Jesus mostly in terms of such myths anymore than we should with any leader. We should assess the truth and usefulness of his teachings and of what people believe about him. If a particular belief, however rooted in myths, does not undercut his teachings, then we do not have to declaim about the myth.

By dwelling in myths, people do overlook Jesus' teachings and so miss the mark. People would benefit by having it pointed out that: much of what they think is important about Jesus is mere myth, they should focus on the teachings, and it is easier to focus on the teachings if they repress the myths for a while. Some people do use myths to enable acting badly. But people respond poorly to argument that it is all "only myth". They cling to myth whether the focus is religion, politics, pop culture, academic doctrine, or the idea that evolved beings can think entirely free of myths and metaphors. Busting all myths leads to backlash, even greater dependence on myths, and even more resistance to simple truth. Think of all the myths that you cling to about political leaders, pop culture leaders, your little cultural clique, and your socio-economic class. You want to bust their myths but not yours. I have no general advice here on how to handle the problem.

If you are sick of seeing "Star Wars" on TV, then skip the rest of this section. In his original vision for the "Star Wars" saga, George Lucas had in mind nine movies-episodes. From him, we got the first six of the nine. The first three (the second three as they were released in 1999 and after) were about the fall of good. The middle three (the first three as they were released in 1977 and after) were about the return of good. The last three were supposed to be about how good governs in a democracy. Because of all the stress on uniting the two sides of the Force, I would guess that the last three were supposed to be about how good governs once good has reunited in a stable balance with badness, or at least once reason and emotion have been reunited in a stable balance. We never got those.

Instead, a production company bought Lucas Films (I think Disney), and we got "The Force Awakens" and "Rogue One". There is nothing wrong with those movies. The problem is that they do not follow Lucas' original hope. They do not tackle issues of how reason unites with passion, how good unites with bad yet keeps control, or how the unified force governs, especially in a democracy. In comparison to the original hope, they are merely slam-bang heroes-v-villains action movies. There is not much difference between them and most action movies. They continue the theme of "feisty girl" as it had been developed elsewhere. Rather than use Lucas' mythology and work through it, they fall back on the stock mythology of action movies. That tactic works well at the box office. Something similar happened to "Star Trek". This is what it means not to think through myths but rather to let them control our thinking.

If Lucas had carried out the original conception, and done it well, that might have been an example of thinking well through myths, or using myths to think well.

This Book is not Primarily about Politics.

With the American twist on old myths, and with the plight of the reasonable conservative, I have moved over into politics. This book is not primarily about politics. True, I did give my political ideas in Chapter Two, and I do use them to assess religious stances. But I do not describe many political stances and I do not use my ideals to assess those stances. I do not assess Liberals and Conservatives here. Political stances are the subject of other work.