

# RELIGIOUS STANCES

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#### DEDICATION:

This book is for the decent people, on this world, and all worlds. I have met many but can mention only Nitaya Polioudakis (Patsanakrison) and Norm Gross.

This book is for people who are trying to make better their community, neighborhood, religious group, ethnic group, gender group, age group, socio-economic class, nation, and the world. Good luck.

“Fury” does not necessarily mean anger, madness, moral zealotry, or bad-ass rebellion. This book is for people who feel a fury inside and need a way to get it out with minimal badness and maximal goodness.

This book is for people who want to blend reason with religion and practicality with ideals.

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## CONTENTS

Page number indicates the pages within a chapter only and is not cumulative. The long chapters usually have parts that can be skipped if desired. Part 2 can be skipped at first reading.

### PART 0

00 Introduction	10
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### PART 1

01 Basic Beliefs	52
02 Basic Politics	40
03 Evolution of Human Nature	50
04 Issues 1	63
05 Issues 2	37
06 Codes	37
07 Romanticism	81
08 Decent People and Indecent People	49

### PART 2

09 Atheism	33
10 Undermining, Picking Apart, Bolstering, and Emptiness	15
11 Philosophical Interlude	14
12 The Self	20
13 Free Will	17
14 Badness	15

### PART 3

15 Common Themes	39
16 Common Mistakes	42
17 Worlds 1	22
18 Worlds 2	22
19 Common Mass Religion	16
20 The Future and the Supposed End of the World	8
21 Legalism, Exclusivity, and Fundamentalism	27

### PART 4

22 Judaism, Christianity, and Islam	45
23 Theravada Buddhism	64
24 Mahayana Buddhism	67
25 Background to China, and Confucius	31
26 Taoism	55
27 Zen	33
28 Relativism, Hierarchy, and Encompassing	18
29 Hinduism: Not "All Paths Lead to God"	99

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Under construction

## 00 Introduction

A “stance” includes: the Golden Rule, be true to the rebel code, be your “true you” regardless, honor, life is good, life is tough, do good, avoid evil, and many more. Some stances are not compatible such as: honor versus getting ahead; all paths lead to God vs. there is only one way to God; life is only a game vs. life is real; help your neighbor vs. “look out for number one”; and simple decency vs. hard-ass “gangster” attitude. Then we have to choose. Religions are big stances that include small stances, and organize the stances around themes.

This book assesses stances that are important for modern people and it assesses major religions. I say both what is right and what is wrong. This book is not neutral. I do not assess political stances such as liberalism or the Tea Party outlook. I focus on life stances such as “be a rebel”, religious stances such as “all we need to do is act naturally”, and major religions such as Christianity and Romanticism. I point out the political implications of stances and religions. I avoid standard theological issues such as about the Christian Trinity, faith versus works, and the Will of God.

As everybody does, I use my beliefs and values as the basis for assessing. I use both my religious and political values as the basis for assessing. I state my own beliefs and values briefly below, and again in later chapters in more detail. You can still benefit from this book if you disagree with me.

The point is not to harangue anybody into agreeing with me. The points are: to present clear standards; give basic description of stances and religions; see how standards can be used rightly to assess stances and religions; urge you to develop standards; and help you relax so you can be a better person, act well, make the world better, feel better, not waste yourself, do less harm, and avoid mistakes. I use no tricks. People already know much of what I say even if they have not heard it said clearly. I just say it in writing so you can think about it at your own pace.

### **Theory and Practice.**

I care more about what people do than about doctrine. I want people to act well. I hope people act well because they have good ideas but having particular ideas is less important than acting well.

Still, ideas matter. Ideas shape what we do. Bad ideas often lead to bad acts while good ideas do lead to good acts. To guide what we do, we interpret ideas such “what would Jesus do?”, and “follow the middle path of the Buddha”. We reject bad ideas such as “only the sacred book of group X tells the Will of God” and “we have a right to be obnoxious because we are oppressed”. I want people to hold ideas that are clear, simple, moral, realistic, practical, true to human nature, mostly consistent, and go along with science. I want people to act according to good ideas. I want people to reject bad ideas. So I assess the ideas behind stances.

All religions have good and bad doctrines. Some doctrines promote good ideas and interpretations. For instance, Christianity teaches the Golden Rule and it interprets the Rule through the parable of the Good

Samaritan. Some doctrines teach bad ideas and enable bad behavior, such as “all people who disagree with us go to Hell and we should hurt them even while they are still on Earth”. Luckily, nearly all people in all religions act well most of the time regardless of dogma. Usually people act well to neighbors even when neighbors believe another religion. Nearly all people interpret dogma so as to act well, get along with neighbors, and help each other. Sometimes believers override the dogma of their religion so they can act well by modern standards, as when people use birth control although their religion tells them they may not. I assess religions according to the ideas they offer and according to how people interpret the ideas so as to act well in the modern world.

### **My Basic Religious Stance.**

The Enlightenment lasted from about 1650 to 1900. George Washington, Ben Franklin, James Madison, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson were people of the Enlightenment, and the Constitution of the United States is an Enlightenment work. My basic stance is like the Enlightenment. Many people now hold a stance similar to the stance given in this book.

This section lists the main points in my religious stance. Order does not indicate importance. The first chapter gives a full account of my religious stance while the second gives my political stance. Briefly, I assess stances and religions by how well they accept the following ideas and how well they promote some of my political ideas. .

-God created a world that could be very good.

-We all go to meet God when we die.

-God loves you. Try to love other people as God loves you. You can't fully succeed but you can try.

-God wants you to do the right things for the right reasons, not from fear or from hope of reward.

-You do not have to accept God, or Jesus as God, to live by the remaining points.

-The Golden Rule (act toward other people as you want them to act toward you). Be kind.

-All rules apply equally to everybody, including you, your kin, your friends, neighbors, enemies, etc. Act as if you have to do what you want everybody to do. Allow everybody to do what you want to do. Do not do what you do not want others to do. Allow everybody to do what a free person making up his-her own mind could do.

-Treat people as persons rather than as objects.

-Respect nature and take care of nature.

-Decency.

-Work hard to make the world better.

-People who have more talent, wealth, time, energy, or power need to do more.

-Live and let live.

-Be useful.

-Pay it forward.

-Morality has to be mixed with practicality.

-Don't be bad. Don't be indecent.

-Do not enable indecent people. The Golden Rule means to help people deeply, not to give them what they want, enable them, or make them dependent. Sometimes the best help is the truth.

-"The truth will set you free". Seek the truth. Be honest about the truth. Accept the truth when you see it. Reject what is false, and reject lies, when you see them.

-Be open to getting better. Be open to letting other people, life, the world, and God guide you. You do most of the work on your own, but you can get help, and, very likely, you will get help if you ask.

-Science is correct.

-Religion and stances should be free of hurtful dogmas and wrong ideas.

-Assess what needs to be done and what you can do. Use your time, energy, and resources to do the most good. Don't waste what God has given you.

-Be committed and strenuous (zealous) when the feeling and the cause take you, as long as you really do more good than harm.

-But don't be zealous mostly to make yourself feel good, don't let zealotry cause more harm than good, and don't let zealotry become immoral. Avoid hurtful bad zealotry.

-A simple decent act done without regard to system often works well enough. Don't be confused by dogma, ideology, or system.

-I say the following many times in many ways throughout the book: God cares far less that you worship Jesus as God than you do as Jesus taught. If you do as Jesus taught but don't worship Jesus as God, then you are alright. If you worship Jesus as God but do not do as he taught, God will scold you severely. If you neither worship Jesus as God nor do as he taught, then I can't say much more. If you both worship Jesus as God and do as Jesus taught, then good for you, but please stay humble, and don't think you are better than other good people in God's eyes.

-I expect religions to be compatible with the main ideas of American plural democracy, and to promote those ideas within the limits of their beliefs.

### **Not All Paths Lead to God; Not All Religions are Equally Useful.**

Our time hopes to ease strife by declaring “all paths lead to God” and “God is one”. The intent is good but the idea is false. By claiming all religions are the same, we lie to ourselves, do not ease strife, and wrong all religions. We do better to face differences squarely, see what we can live with, see what we can negotiate, and see what we have to worry over. I hope all religions promote the good ideas, acts, and people that we need in modern plural democracies; and I hope all believers act well. But religions don’t always promote good ideas and good people for our times. We have to be clear about ideas and actions so it makes sense when we assess a religion.

My values come from the West. Western values come from a mix of Jesus’ ideas with European ideas, mostly from Greece and Northwest Europe. My view is like American Christianity but does not insist that Jesus is God. This is the religious stance that I see as best and against which I measure other stances and religions, including standard Christianity. I do not think other religions are much inferior to this stance and I do not overlook their particular good points. Yet I do insist this is the best stance that I have found and that other stances are not as good as this stance overall.

### **Religion, Power, and Pop Culture.**

Religion causes some pain but religion causes fewer problems than economics, politics, ethnicity, and gender. Sometimes people argue over pure religion but not often. People use religious ideas as tools in fights that really are about other issues. The main vehicle for ideas now is pop culture. The Beatles got “nailed” when John Lennon deplored that they were “more popular than Jesus”, but he was right. People get more from pop media than from traditional religious ideas and heroes. We get more from Spiderman (“with great power comes great responsibility”), rock rebels, and hip-hop “gangsters” than from Moses, Thomas Aquinas, Mohammad, or the Buddha. Ronald Reagan owed more to Captain America and to a wrong pop version of Adam Smith than to Jesus. People suffer more from lack of good political, ethnic, economic, and gender visions than from the lack of religious ideas. If we could make capitalism work well we would argue less about the greatest god and what he-she demands. To assess relevant stances, it seems I should focus on power, politics, wealth, ethnicity, gender, and pop culture rather than on religion.

First, sex, economics, politics, world order, ethnicity, gender, and pop culture are big topics themselves and they should be treated on their own.

Second, we can’t get clear about power, wealth, ethnicity, gender and pop culture until we are clear about stances and religion. Confusion in one fosters confusion in the other. Americans don’t have visions of politics and economics that actually work in the real world. So, instead, we use bad ideas from religion as tools to attack other groups and to get ours. We can’t make a workable political or economic vision until we calm down and get clear about stances and religion. This book aims to clarify issues and calm people down. Hopefully the insights about stances and religion can carry over into politics, economics, ethnicity, gender, and pop culture.

### **Use Your Mind; Not Blinded by the Light.**

We need to think things through even if we had a religious education and even if we have had religious experiences of our own. We have to use our heads and hearts. Even people who have strong religious experiences rarely know what to do on the basis of the experience alone. They need to interpret their experiences and they need help doing so. Sometimes they are wrong in their interpretation and need correcting. Even people who have seen God still need to think things through when they stop being blinded by the light. Even Paul needed help. When the light slowly fades to the level of mere summer sunshine, what ideas do you accept or reject? What do you do? Who do you help? How do you help them? This book helps people who want to think things through.

### **Religion of “Just do Good”.**

Boiled down, I tell people to “just do good”. This stance might sound simplistic and easy to do but it is not. To borrow from the chapter on Zen, people are taught this idea since they are two years old but few people eighty years old actually do it. We need help. Many situations are hard to decide. We seek dogma. We are born into the dogma of particular religions and political parties. We are born Christians and Democrats. Some of the doctrine is good but not all. Conniving bad people put bad ideas into our heads so as to use us. We use dogma to fool ourselves to get what we want. So we will not let go of dogma enough to “just do good”. We need help fighting bad ideas and bad people. It doesn't take much space to say “just do good”. It takes many pages to describe the pitfalls and to put up fences around the pitfalls so we can “just do good”.

For major theistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, “just do good” cannot be enough. People not only have to do good, they also have to know right dogma and worship the right God correctly. If people do not also recognize God and worship him correctly, then doing good alone will bring down the wrath of God. For non-theistic religions, Buddhism, some Hinduism, and some Taoism, “just do good” alone is not enough because it does not lead to fully seeing how the world works. For them, in “just do good”, we become part of an illusory painful world of Dharma, karma, and dogma. Both traditional theistic and non-theistic religions are wrong.

I would like people to acknowledge God but I don't insist on it. If doing good is not good then something is badly wrong. If we can place doing good in the context of ideas such as God, then maybe better; but we should work on doing good first and then let dogma follow of its own.

### **What the Book is Not.**

I do not condemn. God, and only God, is the final judge of stances, religions, and people. I am not the final judge. I do assess and criticize.

This book does not show you how to find God, find grace, have a huge religious experience, or find God's love. Other books do that. This book takes for granted God's love but not that you have found it. If you have found God's love already, this book will help you think through what to do next.

This book is not as would be written by a true believer orthodox (standard) Christian. It is not a devotional book. It is written by a moderately smart person who wants to understand with both heart and head.

I am not interested in exposing hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is in all religions, it is obvious to most people, and it has been exposed so well that there is no point repeating. There are more important points. I only bring up hypocrisy when it is relevant in a way that is not usually obvious.

I am not interested in deriding popular religion. Mostly I just leave it alone. People can be gracious and helpful through popular religion and despite popular religion.

Superstition is silly but I don't bother to debunk it. That too has been "done to death". People still believe in ghosts but their belief does little damage except to credit card statements and to the quality of movies, TV shows, and talk. Mostly superstition funds the entertainment industry. Long live vampire love.

The biggest religion in the world is not Christianity or Islam but "spiritualism" or "animism". Briefly, it is belief in spiritual powers, animal spirits, ghosts, mediums, seeing the future, people with hidden power, amulets, etc. It tends to rely on "us versus them". I don't bother with spiritualism except as it mixes with major religions to make popular religion. Spiritualism is false. Spiritualism is not relevant. Intelligent educated aware people should not believe in it.

Popular religion is a mix of spiritualism with the official doctrines of major religions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. It is part of all major religions no matter how much officials of major religions argue with it. Rather than the ideal pure orthodox religion of priests and theologians, popular religion is really what most believers follow in major religions. Popular religion, especially the spiritualistic part, is what atheists attack when they attack all religion. I devote one chapter to popular religion.

(Spiritualism-animism typically has the following features: spiritual power such as "juju" or "the Force"; use of spiritual power such as through relics of saints and through "voodoo"; beings that embody power such as spirits, saints, animal guides, demons, ghosts, and angels; adept humans, such as Jedi, Sith, witches, wizards, priests, pastors, imams, and modern-day prophets; people who "tap into" power, cajole more powerful beings, and who speak for powerful beings such as "witch doctors" and shamans; devotion to mid-level "powers" such as saints, leaders, mountain spirits, and tree spirits; and much fear. Animism-spiritualism thrives in major "high" world religions that otherwise officially dislike it. It is how Communism used to work when Communist leaders were deified, such as Marx and Mao. It is how politics actually works now when we expect political leaders to be "close to God" and to work miracles with the economy, weather, and immigration. Spiritualism-animism is big in popular culture; pop stars effectively are little animist-spiritualist adepts.)

Although I love the art and the amazing ideas that come from mysticism, I do not assess mysticism much. It is not relevant to most people. I do assess ideas that have mystic roots, such as we are all part of each other or we all live many lives.

I am not interested in arguing theology such as about the Christian Trinity, the Hindu Trinity, baptism, sacraments, miracles, or non-dualism. Those topics are not relevant to most people and do not affect

much what people do. I am not interested in defending my version of God. I do present my version of God, and hope people find it appealing.

This book is not a text on “introduction to religions”. I explain everything that you need to know here but I do not give a survey of major religions. This book does not repeat the ideas of old stances that are not important to most people, such Stoicism and Cynicism. Sometimes an old stance has a modern version. The 1950s Beats can be seen as a modern version of wandering Cynics. In that case, what is important is the modern version, and that is what I describe.

This book is not as would be written by a scholar. This book is not a pop book by a philosopher looking to reach a wider audience for his-her ideas. This book is by one religious seeker trying to help other similar people.

### **Bibliography.**

Because this is not a scholarly book, there are no citations and notes in the text. A list of readings is at the back. There you can find some support for points.

### **My Qualifications.**

I write as a religious person. I write as a believer in God. Unlike other people who write about religion, I am not a religious standout. I am not a priest, pastor, minister, or monk. I am not a professor although I did teach for about ten years. I am not enlightened. I am not a saint, mystic, arahant, ryshi, bodhisattva, Taoist adept, Sufi, wizard, shaman, vegetarian, vegan, would-be Jedi, or would-be Sith. I have no ability to contact spirits. I have never seen an angel. I doubt there is a spirit world except for God. I eat healthy but love chocolate and ice cream. I love nature but do not worship it. I do some Tai Chi and a little karate but I do not believe in magic dance, magic healing, chi, or “the Force”. I am not pure of heart. I am about as sinful as most of us. I am not a Romantic “bad boy”. My sins are small and boring, and they do hurt other people. I am sorry for that. I do not go to church, mostly because I am lazy, partly because I do not agree with the doctrines, and partly because it is boring. I am comfortable with “churchy” people. I like all people who live their religion in a way that helps people and nature.

I am a Darwinian (evolutionary) anthropologist but I do not write here as a Darwinian or anthropologist. Do not take me to stand for scientists, Darwinists, or anthropologists. Many would disagree with me. The views here are my views alone.

As an anthropologist, I did eight years of fieldwork in Thailand and several years in Alabama, mostly on economics and families. My work did help me with my stances and my religious views.

I have had a life-long interest in religion. I have been reading about religion since I was about ten years old, including non-Christian religions. Although raised a Greek Orthodox where almost all my neighbors were Protestants, my neighbors were always kind. They never pushed their views, they patiently told me about their religion, and tolerated all religion. Thai Buddhists and Thai Muslims treated me with the same grace when I lived in Thailand.

While living in the United States, I have met people from almost all faiths, including nature mysticism, martial arts mysticism, New Age, Right Wing zealotry, atheism, political correctness, and postured indifference. In Thailand, I lived mostly with Buddhist rice farmers and fisher people. My wife and I worked for a year with Muslim fisher people. We met people of many other religions including Hindus who worshipped various gods and Chinese people who respected their ancestors.

All this has not made me an expert, but most experts have little important to say to people like me.

### **Book Style.**

I do not cite from the Christian Bible or any other religious book. I never studied religion so as to preach it to other people; I did not read about religion so as to write another book; I originally read for curiosity and self help; so I don't remember scripture in the way preachers do. I wrote this book long after I had read about religion for other reasons, so scripture was not fresh in my mind. Besides, citing scripture annoys me. You have to get the idea. If you don't get the idea from plain words, waving a citation at you won't help. When you are in the mood, reading scripture from all the major religions is fun and almost always worthwhile.

This book is not an academic book or intellectual book. It is written from experience. I do not comment on any stance that I have not had personal experience with. I have gone down most of the roads, and made most of the mistakes, that I write about. I write about what I know about.

This book is less like a college lecture than like a twelve-year-old boy wondering aloud about God and the meaning of it all. We need a balance between wondering-about-the-world versus work-to-a-purpose. I had some of that balance when I was young, and that is what I am after here.

I refer to American pop culture and to some fun classic books such as by Walter Scott and Jane Austen. I don't do this to show off, boost interest, or because it is trendy. I learned much of my morality from old movies and from TV shows such as "The Twilight Zone", "Star Trek", and "Gun Smoke". That was a good way to learn morality. These days, people are likely to have seen movies such as "Star Wars" but are not likely to have read Plato or Confucius. To make a point, it is best to refer to what people do know. Even if you don't get a pop culture reference, you can still get the point.

Here are some pieces that are fun and that show some main points of the book:

The novels "Waverley" and "Ivanhoe" by Walter Scott

The novel "The Warden" by Anthony Trollope

The novel "Kim" by Rudyard Kipling

The novel "The Way of All Flesh" by Samuel Butler

The movie, "The Invention of Lying" starring Ricky Gervais and an excellent cast

The movies, “The Searchers” and “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance” directed by John Ford

The movie “Blade Runner” directed by Ridley Scott based on a story by Philip K. Dick

The movie, “Scott Pilgrim versus the World” based on a graphic novel

The books “American Jesus” and “God is Not One” by Stephen Prothero

### **Advice about Reading this Book.**

This book is not nearly as long as it might seem. Many chapters have optional material. About half of the first chapter is optional. The second part of the book can be skipped entirely at first reading. The book is not hard to read.

The book comes in four parts: basics, optional philosophical issues, general material on religions, and the assessment of major religions. Read the first part, the first eight chapters, straight through. Chapters Nine through Fourteen are on issues that appeal to academics but bore most people: atheism, self, free will, badness, and picking apart. Unless you like the topics, skip the middle chapters at first. Chapters Fifteen through Twenty One are ideas that appear in many religions, including mistakes to avoid. You can skim for interesting sections. Chapter Twenty Two starts the assessment of major religions. If you want nothing but basic ideas and my assessment of major religions, read Chapters One through Eight and then Twenty Two to the end. Because I anticipate some people will skip around, I have written the chapters to be somewhat self-sustaining and so they repeat material a bit.

### **The World and God.**

In this book, usually the phrase “the world” means “the common world of experience for most people” and-or means “this whole universe”. Sometimes the phrase refers specifically to planet Earth. You will be able to tell by context what I mean. I accept that the common world of experience is very largely true and very largely real. The world is not an illusion. The world does have some illusions but we can figure them out, and most have been dismissed. The only supernatural is God. The real world is as it is and it is not otherwise. We see the real world as it is well enough, especially with a little help from our intellects and our friends.

When I say “God” I mean almost the stereotype, but not a bearded old man: a person, not material and not energy, who is outside the world, sentient, understands morality and beauty, created this world and all other worlds, used the Big Bang to create this world, used evolution to create sentient-moral beings on various planets, sometimes (but seldom) acts on this world, likes his creation, wants us to do well here, and sometimes sends teachers to help us. We can relate to God as we do to other persons. God is not simply male or female but I learned to think of God as “father” so I use male pronouns. Feel free to use female pronouns. I do not draw a sharp line between God, the world as mind, nous, dharma, Heaven, the Tao, spirit, etc. I relate to God as a person, and I cannot relate to those other things as persons, so I think of God as a giant person. I do not think of God as Nature or as the sum total of all. God is distinct from his creation and is more than his creation. God is not merely embodied in the world or identical to all-the-world. My image of God is not fully correct, but I hope it comes close, and I doubt God dislikes it. I

hope he is amused. I assume my God is the same as in the Jewish-Christian-Muslim tradition. I assume the same God was known, a bit differently, in other traditions, as in China and India. You do not have to believe in my God to act well or to benefit from this book. Disagreeing with me does not make you wrong. I do not assume, because there is only one God, all religions are one, equally good, or equal. People can be wrong even when they refer to the same God. Read this book, and then figure out your own image of God and your own ideas about God's relation to religions.

### **One Apology.**

In a few places in this book, among other examples, I use mud slides to show how people have ignored nature when they eat up the world, such as when they cut down the forest to build houses. I wrote these examples before the horrible mud slide disaster in Washington State in March of 2014. After some worry, I decided to let the examples stand. We suffer when we exploit nature. We need to do better. I am sorry for the people who died and suffered not only in Washington but around the world. I do not mean to insult them or add to their pain. I hope they recover as well as possible. I thank all the wounded people for their courage. I hope we learn from their hurt, and we change our attitudes so nobody else suffers and nature does not suffer.

## 01 Basic Beliefs

This chapter gives my religious beliefs. The next chapter gives my political values. I use both to assess stances later. No ideas here are new. Many people share my beliefs. The point is not to declare anything new but to state ideas clearly and to build a solid base so people with similar views can feel confident. I repeat ideas, so be patient. This chapter is not as long as it seems. If you want to go straight to my beliefs, go to Parts 2, 3, and 4. Part 5 is optional.

My religious beliefs come mostly from the Hebrew tradition, from Jesus, and from his view of the Hebrew tradition. My political values come mostly from classical Greece, Northwestern Europe, and in particular England. These traditions came together to form one stance. My view is similar to the Western Enlightenment of the 1700s: God, the teachings of Jesus, Western political ideas, and practicality. This stance does not insist that Jesus is God.

I hold these values not only because I was born into them. I have studied other values, religions, and cultures, with a sincere open mind, and still I saw that these are the best values. The values of Jesus and the West made the world better, and did so more effectively than other values. I do not denigrate other views but they are not as good and have not done as much good.

I do not persuade. I don't argue that the world is real, God exists, or we should act morally. I do try to get people out of errors such as zealotry. I simply give my beliefs. If they convince you of some good ideas, then I am glad.

Some Christians dislike my beliefs even though I hold Jesus highly. They focus on the fact that I don't believe Jesus was God and they tend to overlook my other points. In essays apart from this book, I comment on relations of my beliefs with orthodox Christianity. Some non-Christians reject my ideas because I took them from Jesus, the West, Christianity, or any religion. Being assailed from two opposite ends does not mean I am in the reasonable middle and I am correct. Please decide for yourself.

### **PART 1: Principles.**

#### **Where Ideas come from Doesn't Matter; What Matters is Truth and Usefulness.**

Where good ideas come from doesn't matter much. Ideas can come from a spill of letter tiles in a board game, evolution, Greek culture, Thai culture, art, science, pop songs, priests, atheists, old spouses, dreams, bad people, and even thoughtful consideration. Albert Einstein got ideas from imagining he chased a light wave, fell off a roof, fell down an elevator shaft, and spun a cylinder. I don't have to know where Hebrews or anybody got the idea of one moral God, Jesus got the Golden Rule, or Thomas Jefferson and James Madison got "We the People".

(Optional philosophical “covering of bases”: What matters: (1) an idea is very likely true, (2) an idea is very likely false, (3) an idea accords, or does not, with other ideas that we take as basic and true, (4) how an idea fits in with general theories about how things work, (5) if an idea might change general theories of how things work, (6) how true an idea is, (7) how we can tell if an idea is true or false, (8) if we can test an idea definitely to see if it is false, (9) an idea is redundant to other ideas, (10) how an idea is useful or harmful, (11) when it is useful or harmful, (12) when an idea is more useful than harmful, (13) we can logically deduce an idea from accepted ideas, (14) an idea explains in simple clear terms, and (15) the use of this idea requires less explanation than other ideas. Often we assess not single ideas but comparisons of ideas and idea systems.)

We should assess ideas by how true and useful they are. Values and beliefs are ideas that we take as true enough to use as basic and to assess other ideas.

My beliefs are basic ideas that I use to assess other ideas, and-or my beliefs are likely true, fit with how I think the world works, more useful than hurtful, accord with historical facts as much as I can figure out facts, and are more so than ideas from other systems.

We should NOT evaluate ideas by: who said them; what culture, ethnic, religion, socio-economic class, gender, or age group they come from; or if they reflect a type such as a rich man, poor single mom, professor, poet, priest, saint, or tyrant. It does not matter that an idea came from anger, love, concern for fellows, patriotism, practicality, sex, greed, conniving, or hate although we naturally pay more attention to ideas that come from good motives.

We cannot “explain away” good ideas or “explain in” bad ideas. “Nothing but” is not allowed. We cannot “explain away” true good ideas by saying they came from some person or motive that we don’t like. A good or true idea from a Muslim, Jew, Christian, European, Asian, man, woman, friend, enemy, lunatic, sinner, or saint, or from love, anger, greed, generosity, sex, or sexism, is still good and true. A bad or false idea from a teacher, preacher, spouse, rebel, marginal group, rock poet, hip hop artist, professor, or our self, or from love or anger, is still bad or false. We cannot say a false bad idea is true and good by saying it came from a person or motive we like, or leads to results that we like regardless of overall benefit. We cannot adopt a false bad idea because it serves us. We cannot stop a true good idea because it does not serve us well or it gives them an advantage. Too many ideas in politics, religion, social life, and social science have been adopted or rejected for bad reasons.

Sometimes it is useful to consider motives and origin in discussing ideas as when we say that a song is typical of a bar band, Western Swing, or teen love; legislation is motivated by desire for ethnic support or business support; a political analysis is typical of man-bashing feminism or right wing backlash; or a vision comes from the Spirit or the Devil. But that practice never means we need not assess an idea on merits and never means we can explain away an idea or explain it in. We still have to use our heads and experience. Using motives and origin to explain away or explain in, and using “nothing but”, are so heavily abused, and so often kill reason, that we should not use them for politics, religion, or social life until we have practiced for decades assessing ideas only on grounds of truth and usefulness.

This stance toward ideas also applies to the ideas of Jesus but people react strongly to the ideas of Jesus and of most religious leaders. People assess according to bias rather than truth and usefulness. Because Jesus offered a unique way of life, played a key role in world history, and began a major religion, it can matter that Jesus was the person who set some ideas into Western culture and world history. First, some people who follow religions other than Christianity, or who dislike Christianity, discount Jesus' ideas. They explain away the ideas of Jesus as coming from the wacky male Jewish (or anti-Jewish) leader of a cult run by poor people, or as "merely ideas of Western males". Second, Christians who worship Jesus as God focus on some ideas that they like and use the status of Jesus as God to validate those ideas, such as that we can approach God only through the Church. They overlook other ideas of Jesus such as that rich powerful people care mostly about wealth and power, or that what matters is what we do for the Kingdom of God. They use Jesus to bolster ideas that came from elsewhere such as the Trinity. We have to seek the truest meaning and best use of Jesus' ideas without regard for feelings about Jews, Christianity, the West, men, and women. What difference it makes that Jesus' ideas came from him emerges throughout the book.

What matters is that we follow Jesus' ideas because they are good, true, work well with Western political values, work well with practicality, and have led people to do great things. In that way, "it does not matter where ideas come from" is still true even with Jesus.

### **Guessing Well about What to Do.**

I don't know the deepest secrets of existence. Nobody else does either, not the most glamorous mystic, highest church person, or strident logical atheist. I have to guess. Everybody does.

We do not guess in a vacuum or only to indulge ourselves. We guess because we have to live, have to use ideas to live, and have to consider the motives of other people. We do know some ideas that are effectively true enough to live by such as that this world is real enough. We make reasonable assumptions such as that persons are real and goodness matters. We infer even if we can't prove, such as that God exists. We accept principles to live by such as the Golden Rule. We use all this assuming and inferring for good guesses about what to do.

Doing matters more than dogma. "Actions speak louder than words". If Taylor officially believes religious zealotry, but never hurts anybody, and gives food and medical care to a child out of his-her group, that counts most. If Chris officially believes the Golden Rule and "love your neighbor" but acts like Scrooge, a racist, or zealot, that is what counts. If Kim says "Green Lives Matter" but allows Green people to kill each other in huge numbers, selective inaction is what matters. If Kelsey shouts "Pro Life" but attacks nurses and confused unhappy women, and never adopts any babies, that matters. If Jo doesn't understand the Holy Trinity or how Jesus saves but helps at a food bank or an animal shelter, those acts are what matter.

People often officially believe one thing but act as though they believe another. Through their acts and words, we can guess at what they really believe, and we can assume what they really believe pushes their acts. Still, we should look first at what they do, regardless of what they say or what we guess about their true motives.

We can act well even if we haven't figured out deepest truth and even if we do not hold rounded logically consistent theories of everything. We can act well even if we are wrong about some things and even if we hold some silly ideas. Monotheists, polytheists, people who are "spiritual but not religious", atheists, spiritualists, animists, nature worshippers, Calvinists, and Roman Catholics all can act well even though they can't all be right.

Theory and practice come together but not entirely together and not equally. What we think and what we do (1) are not the same; but (2) are related; and (3) what we do is more important than what we say. (1) Nobody drives a car strictly according to a manual and the traffic laws just as nobody plays golf from a book. (3) In driving, we act mostly on reflexes and common sense, and we let safety trump the law. (2) Although nobody drives according to a book, still people's ideas (attitudes) influence how they actually drive. Defensive drivers differ from "squirrels" that jump lanes. People who drive to go safely from A to B differ from boys who drive to impress girls, the gang, or the "hood".

Even without knowing deepest secrets, we can still figure out enough to guide us in what to do. You can act well, or at least better. You can "drive" life well, or at least better. If you don't get anything else from this book, you can still get a sense of what to do.

In life as with driving, ideas-attitudes-and-principles do shape our acts. What we do differs if we: (A) hold goodness most important versus hold success is most important; (B) think "I want to do good because it is good" versus "I want to do the Will of God so God will think well of me and send me to heaven"; or (C) think "What goes round comes round" versus "I am entitled and can do no wrong". We guess about truth, theorize, accept or reject authority, and follow principles. Even if we can't know for sure, we would like to know as well as we can. We look at ideas and at acts based on ideas with the aim of holding reasonable ideas and of acting well.

It helps to guess and it is fun to guess. Imagination is one of the best parts of being human. I urge you to guess what the world is all about and what that means for what we do and should do.

When imagining, keep in mind the link between ideas and acts. Think about what you want and about how that affects how you think. It is easy to rationalize. Think how one person shapes what another person thinks so as to guide behavior. Think how other people do that to us, and how we do it to other people.

Don't let bad guesses subvert basic principles like the Golden Rule, and don't let people lead you astray through your needs for imagination and ideas. Stick with simple decent sensible ideas. Don't get caught up in ideologies that make you do bad things or stupid things.

Don't believe people who assert they do know the deepest secrets of the world, whether they are mystic, bishop, monk, atheist, prophet, politician, professor, artist, or rebel. Don't be misled by people who say they know what you should do, who say they are masters of morality. Don't be misled by zealots. Disagree with me. You don't know all about theory and practice but you do

know enough to guess well. This book intends not to give you all the answers but to help you find likely truths, make good guesses, find principles, and feel confident about acting well.

### **We Need Some Principles.**

If we could just act spontaneously, from the heart, and everything worked out well, then we would have little need for religion and government. Sometimes this works among small groups of kin or friends. Sadly, mostly when people do what they want, things work out badly. Even when most people get along, enough people act badly to ruin it all. Even when people act mostly on good motives, enough bad motives arise in everyone. Even when people act mostly on good motives, not all good motives are compatible; and even a small amount of conflict is enough to ruin it all.

Nearly everybody has common sense and a sense of simple decency, and the two senses are similar for nearly everybody. If these senses were enough to get by and to run government, then we would be fine. But even when most people try to act on the basis of common decency, things don't work out as well as we need. Common decency doesn't tell us what to do about terrorists, identity thieves, and thugs. Enough people overlook common decency to do what they want so that they "screw it up" for all of us. All of us overlook common decency too often. All of us twist common decency so that our version becomes not really common decency but excuses, and we do it enough to "screw it up" for everyone. People differ in ideas of common decency enough to cause problems and enough so we cannot base society only on intuitions of common decency. While we can never overlook common decency, we need something more. The fact that human life cannot be based on simply acting from the heart or on common decency is one of the great sad realities of human life.

If all people had mystic insight, the insight guided us in how to act, and everybody agreed on the insight and advice, we could trust mystic insight alone. If all of us were mystic visionary saints and we all shared the same religion, it might work out. But most of us do not have mystic visions; any intuitions that we do have do not give realistic guidelines about how to act; and the intuitions of mystics do not all agree.

If God had given us a clear set of commands that everybody agreed on, we could live by those. The major deistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam claim that God did just that. But even they do not agree on what the commands are or how to interpret them. The commands that they attribute to God are not alone enough to live by. The commands that they offer do give us a good starting point to figure out what more we need.

If (1) God gave us a clear set of principles such as "do unto other people as you would have them do unto you" and "all rules apply equally to everyone", and (2) the principles covered behavior well enough, then that would work. Just as God did not give us a clear simple adequate set of commands, so also he did not give us a clear simple adequate set of principles, although deistic religions do claim that he did that for each of them in particular and did it best for each of them in particular. Jews, Christians, Muslims, and some Hindus each claim that God gave them the best principles, better than other religions. Deistic religions disagree about what the prophets said and about which is the most important message; so they disagree on the principles. We need a more

solid foundation for principles than “I say God said”. We need some criteria for good principles, we need logic, and we need the experience of the past.

If we could get a simple clear full set of principles from logic alone, and people would go along with principles from logic alone, that would do. Once we had the principles from logic, then we could find a way to reconcile the principles with decency, common sense, intuition, commands, and the teachings of various prophets. “Do unto others” and “all rules apply equally to everybody” are two of the best usual candidates that philosophy offers for principles based on logic alone. Logic is one good place to start but, by itself, logic is not enough.

First, we cannot get a full set of clear simple compelling principles from logic alone. Some key principles we can't get from logic alone, such as “work hard to make the world better”, “pay it forward”, “love your neighbor”, and “love your enemy”. We need an outside source of good principles. Logic can be used to help assess principles once we get them from other sources, such as religion, but logic alone cannot originate them.

Second, even when people agree intellectually with principles that have their roots in logic alone, people will not act on principles that are merely logical. People must feel commitment and passion in addition to logic. People don't follow the Golden Rule because it is logical but because Jesus said it and because it makes gut sense after he said it.

Third, even if most people agree with principles-from-logic-alone and act well, too many other people refuse to accept principles-from-logic-alone and-or refuse to act well enough on that basis. A person can accept a logical argument but still not act on the conclusion. Kirk did this to Spock all the time, and men and women accuse each other of this constantly. Too many people do not accept “all rules apply equally to everybody”. Too many people understand and accept “all rules apply equally” as beautifully logical but do not carry it out well. Logic is useful to guide us through what major religions have offered as candidates for good principles but logic alone is not enough without outside suggestions and an added push. Often we get both suggestions and push from major religions and from human experience.

We need a simple clear set of principles that go along well with common sense and the sense of simple decency, accord well with principles that were given us by the major religions, and make good logical sense whether or not we can derive them from logic alone. We need principles that appeal to people, on which people will act, to which people will commit, and by which we can assess what people do and the institutions they make. We need to accept that the principles are basic and have weight. We need principles that can serve as the basis for personal action, good institutions such as charities and schools, and good government. We need principles that we can interpret for varying situations in our changing world. We need principles that we can blend with practicality without betraying the principles. We need principles that can serve as the basis for good modern pluralistic democracy.

I find these principles in the teachings of Jesus mixed with practically and with Western ideas about persons, citizenship, and government. Below I give specific criteria for good principles. Here I just point out that the principles already exist and where to find them.

Other religions, including Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism, do have similar ideas. But the principles in those religions that are similar to ideas from Jesus and the West are not as basic in those religions. Other ideas are more important in other religions, such as submission to God and his representatives, enlightenment, dharma-as-social-duty, being a member of a great joyous cosmic system, and a Heavenly Kingdom. Principles similar to those from Jesus and the West do not arise as naturally in other religions. The key principles of other religions have not served as the basis for good institutions and good government in societies that were founded on those religions. Ideas similar to the principles from Jesus and the West have not served to found good institutions and good government in societies that were based on other religions even when those religions had similar ideas.

Luckily, all religions can work with the ideas of Jesus and the West without distorting the religion much. All religions can adopt these principles in their own ways and can make them the basis for their versions of good modern societies. So I do not press hard on the fact that these principles came to be important through Jesus and the West; but I do make the point several times.

Principles are my way to combine simple acts of decency and goodness with a system without letting the system take control. They are my way to mix simple acts of decency and goodness with ideals, practicality, and proven values such as “rule of law”, without forcing everything into a theological or political system. Principles are my way to combine the simple direct insights of Jesus’ stories with practicality, ideals, and Western values. We will see what that means as we go along in the book.

### **The Principles Have to Feel Holy, and Usually Arise from Religion.**

Logic alone does not give us all our principles; and logic alone does not lead people to act well enough even when it supports principles. Besides reason, we need other sources for principles and we need passion and commitment. As people, we have to feel that the principles are our principles and that our principles matter enough to stand on. For this book, and to give good advice generally, we have to find what can lead us to proper commitment to good principles but not lead to zealotry and other badness.

Without going into a long defense, I can fairly say that people need to feel that their principles are grounded in something bigger-than-me, and this bigger-than-me is usually God, Dharma, Tao, Heaven, a god, or the core “force” of a religion. People need to feel their principles are grounded in religion and-or are holy. When people feel their principles are holy, they more likely follow their principles. They more likely follow morality, laws, and rules.

To fully get this point, take away overt religion so we can see how tacit religion still asserts a role. Some people do not feel very religious but still feel democracy is special and we should follow it. They might not know it, but these people effectively feel democracy is holy. Democracy gets its power to govern because democracy is holy in general even if not holy in one particular religion. If people did not feel democracy was holy, they would not die for it. Some people feel this way about Truth and Science. Even atheists feel that their principles are grounded in logical morality,

and logical morality reflects what the universe is all about. In effect, atheists hold logical morality holy. If they did not feel that logical morality represents the universe and so is holy, they would not follow it and would not push their ideas on to other people.

Not only do we need the power of religion behind good principles but often good ideas about morality and human social life came first from religion. People did not get ideas such as “love your neighbor”, “one moral God”, or “live and let live” from abstract thinking but from religion, even if, later, abstract thinking supported the ideas. We need to accept that many good ideas came from religion. This does not mean we need not assess ideas by truth and usefulness but it does mean we should be historically accurate. It means we have to take into account the power that religion has for originating good ideas and supporting good ideas.

Because good ideas often came from religion, and religion provides the power behind ideas, it is hard to separate ideas from one particular religion. Particular religions generate and support ideas, not general religion. If humanity develops a general religion in the future, then we can talk about how general religion supports ideas but, in the real past, and for the real present, we have to see ideas in the context of the particular religions that made and support them. Even general ideas that obviously apply beyond their religion of origin, and were intended to apply beyond their religion of origin, tend to be tied to one particular religion. Although Christians intended the idea to apply beyond the circle of Christians, people think “love your neighbor” is Christian. Although Hindus intended “you are that (those people and those animals)” and “great compassion” to apply beyond Hindus, people still think it is a Hindu idea. People still see “one moral God” as a Jewish idea although it is now the basis for other religions. People think “the Middle Path” is a Buddhist idea although the idea appears all over including Aristotle. People think democracy is a Western idea although it is becoming the common form of government in the world.

People follow ideas better if they think the ideas are peculiar to their own religion. People usually feel that good principles come out of one specific religion, their own religion, and only from their own religion. It is hard for people who come from one faith to feel that the ideas in another faith are holy enough to follow, even when the ideas are really good, and even when, oddly, the ideas are nearly the same in both faiths. People who believe the same ideals about democracy care if we ground the ideals in Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, or Buddhism. Muslims and Jews follow the same dietary laws but feel the laws are different and essentially of their religion alone. Atheists want people to follow morality because it is rooted in their logic and not because it comes from Krishna or Confucius even if the points of the morality are the same.

People want other people to follow not only the same values and morality that they do but also the same religion. This conflict can be resolved but it is not easy.

In the modern world of plural democracies, we still need religion to get our principles and we still need religion to back our principles but we cannot use any one particular religion and there is no “general religion” to which particular religions can assent. People live by particular religions from particular groups yet different groups have to live together, each particular religion has to support democratic values, and people in each particular religion have to feel that democratic values are

congenial to their particular religion. Overcoming this dilemma is a big task of the modern state. This conflict appears again throughout the book.

We have to figure out the relation of religion to principles. We have to figure out how to use the feeling of religion to back the right principles without leading to abuses.

Usually as children, we get our principles along with our religion, and our principles are backed by religious authority, so we feel bound to work with the principles that we inherit even if not all of us fully understand them. Religion works with moral values to give power to get people to act well enough, usually beginning when they are children.

As long as the principles are correct enough, then things could work out well, even if most of the people don't fully understand the principles.

Correct-enough-principles-not-always-deeply-understood-but-widely-followed worked fairly well when everybody was of the same race and religion. In an old agrarian village, people could find a set of principles to live by, and the principles could accord well with decency and common sense. In the modern world, this accord is hard to find because people of various religions and stances have to live together, and people hold to the literal words of religions. The old life of everyone going along with common principles even when we don't all personally understand them is what many people wish for in our modern complicated vexing world.

Unluckily, when taken uncritically in a heritage, now for the modern world, too often principles are not good enough, and they are often not well understood, but still widely followed. Tradition can work against us. Even tradition that once was good can work against us now. People denigrate ideas even when they know the ideas are good because the ideas came from another religion and another group and did not come from our religion and our group. People support ideas even when they know the ideas are inferior because the inferior ideas came from our religion and our group and the other better ideas came from another religion and another group. Modern religious zealots deny principles such as the equality of women and equality of ethnic groups even when they know those are the truest best ideas because the ideas came from White Christian Western men and women. People deny the idea of one moral God because it came from Jews, Muslims, and Christians. This attitude makes modern plural democracy hard.

Everybody thinks his-her principles are good and are best, but, in fact, people do settle on bad principles sometimes, or at least bad in the modern world of complicated economics, complicated government, international relations, and mixed peoples. Think of terrorists, crusaders, zealots, and thugs. What if the principles are not good although backed by religion? What if principles are downright bad? When people of different religions and needs compete, they likely stick hard to their original ideas, even to poor principles and bad principles.

Luckily, people also do reject bad ideas when better ideas arise. People do accept better ideas. People can change, and do change when better ideas appear, as long as better ideas do not undermine their personal and family success much. People change especially when better ideas can improve the success of their children and grandchildren.

Suppose people adopt new better principles. A leader gets people to see a better way. After people adopt new principles that do work well enough at the time, then their children get born into the principles. Then the situation is as if good principles were always handed down from on high. Thinkers within the prevailing religions find ways that their religion can support “new” principles – or really did support new principles all along but we just didn’t see it. Even atheists find how to ground democracy in logical morality. Then religion gives its validation, passion, and commitment to good principles. Then the fact that principles seem holy is good because it gets people to live by correct principles even when many people do not fully understand. This is happening to new generations now that are growing up in modern plural democracies. I doubt this effect alone will lead to a general religion to which all particular religions can assent but it can provide enough common ground to live together peacefully.

This book is largely about presenting the right principles. I do not try to prove the right principles. I hope I say enough for you to feel the principles and commit to them. Enough good thinkers from every tradition have seen the value of the principles that I present here so that people can accept them without much anguish. If you understand them, agree with them, and feel them, you can try to get your fellows to go along even if your fellows do not fully understand. The best principles can do the job of guiding modern life and can serve as the basis for modern pluralistic democracy if we put them into practice.

I am lucky because I stumbled on the right principles, and I think God endorses these ideas. The ideas are holy enough to live by. I am happy if other religions have versions. I hope we all look into history so we can appreciate where the ideas came from. Most people can believe in these ideas, and can hold them holy enough to act on, even if a person does not ground the ideas in the Judaic God. If the ideas appeal to you, and are important enough to live by, then think about why you hold to them as if they were holy.

## **PART 2: Essential Beliefs.**

This part of the chapter states my religious ideas. Below, and in later chapters, I expand on the ideas. I do not argue for these ideas. I merely state them. Take the ideas here as my assertion of basic principles like axioms and definitions in mathematics.

### **Briefly.**

We should be able to get any religion in half-an-hour. If not, something is wrong. The material in this section is what you could get in half-an-hour. I repeat this material below at more length.

God exists. God made the world and set the rules. God is the only supernatural that you have to think about.

God loves you and wants you to do well spiritually.

Trust God. Love God as much as you can. You don’t have to love God perfectly.

## Polioudakis: Religious Stances

After you die, you have to face God.

Be decent.

Do good and avoid evil.

Do the right things for the right reasons. God wants you to do the right things for the right reasons, out of your own choice. God wants you to do good because it is good.

Treat all other people as persons. Love other people as God loves you, as much as you can.

The Golden Rule: Treat other people as you want them to treat you. Act as you want all people to act. Don't do what you don't want other people to do. Act as if all that you do rests on general principles that apply to every person equally. Treat all people as persons just like you regardless of social status, wealth, power, religion, ethnicity, gender, etc.

Work hard to make the world better.

Enjoy life and the world.

Make the world better by making it more fair, honest, just, beautiful, productive, interesting, fun, better governed, with less disease, with less hardship, and more enjoyable.

Be proactive. Pay it forward.

Do what you are good at and what suits you.

Thinking hard is part of doing, so think things through.

Treat nature well. Be a steward of nature. Treat animals almost as if they were persons.

If you have more talent, wealth, power, or energy, more is expected of you.

God considers your problems when assessing you. You are naturally able to deal with most of life's issues but not all.

Don't hurt anybody.

Oppose evil. Fight evil physically if you must. Don't become evil when you oppose evil.

Although God loves you and wants you to do well, the world is not about you. The world around you is not about you. You can play a useful role, if you wish, but that does not make you prince.

God only seldom intervenes directly in the world. It is unlikely that God will intervene directly to help you or your group. Instead, God set up the world so that you can get most of what you want if you try hard. "Knock and it shall open for you". God understands that you can try hard and still fail, and does not hold that against you.

A simple act of decency or goodness often works well enough. Don't get confused by systems. Don't get confused by people who claim to know the will of God and want you to do something that feels bad.

Learn from prophets such as Jesus. Almost everything I say is based on Jesus and his message. God wants us to do good because it is good and Jesus tells us how to do good.

The blend of Jesus and Western ideas changed the world, and changed it as no other man has done. Although his message is not completely unique, this is unique: Jesus' vivid presentation, he really lived it, and he put it in the context of the Kingdom of God. We need to accept all this and think about it. We need to take Jesus and his message seriously.

It is impossible to follow Jesus perfectly and live up perfectly to his ideals. We have to combine ideals with practicality. We have to cultivate ideas and institutions that help us govern well. We have to combine ideals, practicality, and governing well. The ideas and institutions that best support good government are Western ideas and institutions.

Our minds are a gift from God. Use your mind. Science is part of our minds. Respect ideas from science including biological evolution and Big Bang cosmology.

Search for truth. Be open to truth, even if it is not what you expected and are used to. Rely on truth to take you to goodness. Follow the truth. From Jesus, "The truth will set you free".

If you open yourself to the truth, trust God, open yourself to God, and work toward getting better, then you will get better. You will find out about yourself and the world. You will learn how to be better. You will not find heaven on Earth but you will find enough to work on for yourself.

God wants you to love all other people but God knows that is an impossible ideal for humans. Do the best you can. God will understand.

Not everybody is like you and not everybody is good, kind, sweet, honest, and knows God as you do. Most people are fun in their particular ways. Let people be who they are as long as they do no serious harm. Many people do not feel God closely and do not accept the ideas given here, yet do a lot of good for the world, and do more good than harm. Some make the world interesting in ways you could not. Accept that and enjoy it.

Don't try to make everybody the same as you. Accept and enjoy as much diversity as you can.

Some people are hurtful. Reject bad. Reject what is harmful. Control what is bad and harmful. Reject and control bad harmful people. Reject and remake bad harmful institutions.

You do not have to feel like one of God's special children to be a good person and to stand well with God. You only have to do what you can as yourself. If you do feel like one of God's special children, then fine.

**Longer.**

God created the world, including you.

The world is as it is. There is no mysterious level of reality. There are no secrets. God is the only supernatural that we have to deal with. We are not deluded by any supernatural beings such as the Devil and we are not helped by any supernatural beings such as angels.

A daffodil is a daffodil, flowers are flowers, a tree is a tree, an oak is an oak, a forest is a forest, an apple smells and tastes like an apple, red things look red, some roses are red while some are yellow, the wind blows, air moves, honesty is honesty, cheating is cheating, decency is decent, hot is hot, good intent is good intent, and gravity leads things to come together. Good, bad, pain, pleasure, joy, and suffering are all real enough. We do not live in a bad illusion or good illusion. We can begin with things as they are. The world is real enough.

God is good. Life is basically good. Rocks, trees, plants, animals, water, light, sounds, tastes, smells, sights, talking, stars, thinking, morality, struggling, body, mind, interaction, community, art, intellect, science, and most aspects of the world are basically good.

God wants us to enjoy life

God wants us to take care of the world and life.

God loves his creation, and wants it to do well, including you in particular.

Trust God.

Be decent. Play fair.

Despite its basic goodness, sometimes the world can be a hard place. Some problems are just in the world, such as earthquakes, malaria, and cancer.

Besides the problems that are naturally in the world, people cause other problems, mostly without need.

Don't make life any harder. Don't hurt anybody. Repent when you do make life harder. Make up for it if you can.

Learn from life, the good things in life, your problems, and the problems of other people.

(1) Follow the Golden Rule: "Treat other people the way you want them to treat you." Treat them as you want them to treat you even if they don't treat you as you want them to treat you. Follow the strong positive version of this rule by being proactive in helping. Follow the "negative" version as well: don't do to other people what you don't want them to do to you.

(2) Follow this idea: All rules apply to everybody equally, including you, kin, friends, neighbors, group members, and even to your opponents and to all the "other" people too. When you make a rule, make it as a general rule for everybody. Act as if you follow such general rules. If you want to do something, other people have the right to do it too. If you don't want them to do it, then you can't do it either. I call all this "applies equally".

(3) Treat everybody as a person, as free and valuable in him-herself. Treat everybody as a free valuable person regardless of social status, wealth, religion, gender, ethnicity, age, etc. Treat some animals, and treat nature, almost as if they were persons.

(4) Treat every adult as a free valuable person who can decide about him-herself unless he-she is mentally disabled.

The Golden Rule, the idea "applies equally", the idea of a person, and the idea of the free adult, are all aspects of the same idea.

There are a few exceptions to the four ideas such as that we don't treat children and sick people as we do adults and healthy people, but these exceptions don't undo the basic idea. Differences of ethnicity, religion, sex, gender, age (except children), occupation, socio-economic class, nation of origin, etc. are not enough to undo the basic idea.

(I got the Golden Rule from Jesus' statement of it, how he lived his life, and his stories; I know other religions have it too. I got formal ideas of "applies equally" and "the person" from Immanuel Kant from around 1800; nearly all people have strong intuitive versions. I got "free adult person" from American culture.)

God wants you to do the right things for the right reasons, on your own. He does not want you to do them from fear of punishment or from hope of reward.

We all need help sometimes. We all can afford to give help sometimes.

Actively help. Be more than passive. Be useful. Do more than look out for yourself. Be kind. Pay it forward. Do what you can. Use your full ability. Actively do for others what you would like them to do for you. Try really hard. Cooperate with other people when you can. Forgive.

Include everybody as much as possible.

It is natural to live with, hang around with, and marry, people of your age, gender, religion, race, socio-economic class, place, language, etc. There is nothing wrong with that but you have to overcome it sometimes. You cannot hate and love only according to group boundaries. You

have to be open to crossing boundaries. You have to let other people in on a good thing when your group has a good thing and when letting them in can stand the expansion. You have to help other people build a good thing when they might be able, willing, and ready. You have to make your group the kind of people that others want to deal with, help, and accept help from. You have to help other people get able, willing, and ready to the extent you can. You have to make your group able, willing, and ready for a better way. People cannot erase boundaries but we can accept that they are there so as to overcome them, and we can practice overcoming them.

Not everybody is good, sweet, kind, honest, and knows God. Some people know God in their own way different from yours. Most people don't know God much but they are just as worthwhile as you are anyway. Many people are interesting and fun in their particularity. Even if a person is not interesting or fun, don't look down on him-her. Don't try to make everybody as you wish you were or you wrongly think you are. Some people are bad and hurtful. You should control them so they do no harm.

We can, and should, work hard to build a continually better world.

The more ability, resources, time, and energy you have, the more you personally have to give.

Decent people are a particular joy and are particularly useful.

You cannot try beyond your ability. You are responsible for trying hard but you cannot carry the world by yourself. All you can do is all you can do. If we accept this idea, usually we can a lot more than we thought we could. God made the world. In the end, God will decide what to do with the world.

Idealism is not enough. We have to mix idealism with practicality and with knowledge based on real world experience. We can do this.

Common sense practicality is not enough. We have to mix common sense practicality with ideas of good government and with good institutions. The best ideas of good government and the best institutions come from the West.

Usually a simple act of goodness or decency is enough without the need for a system. Don't get misled by systems and by the desire for power that lies behind many systems.

We should forgive but we don't have to tolerate repeated hurtful behavior. We should not enable bad behavior, hurtful behavior, or bad hurtful people. To do so only makes it worse. We would not want other people to enable badness in us, so we should not enable it in others. The Golden Rule requires us to really help people, not to give them what they want. Sometimes helping them means telling the truth about bad situations and it means not giving.

Zealotry is usually hurtful.

Don't intervene when not really useful. Don't be a busybody.

When you see you are wrong, stop it now.

Assess yourself, the world, nature, your country, your ethnic group, your religion, the economy, and the people around you. Don't do things, don't act any particular way, just because they tell you to. Go beyond your group.

Use your abilities, time, and effort as best you can to do as much good as you can. Don't waste yourself or the world.

Don't misuse your abilities on zealotry when your real purpose is to make yourself feel righteous, justified, saved, and smug. Even when the cause is good, you are wrong. If you crusade against abortion to make yourself feel justified and smug, then, even if abortion is bad, you are wrong. If you crusade against business and to save nature so as to feel good about yourself, then, even though nature needs help, you are wrong.

If you feel the call of a cause, then go ahead and pursue it vigorously as long as you do more good than harm, do not act immorally, do not act because it makes you feel righteous, and do not enable badness. Commitment to a cause led to a free America. Commitment to later causes led to freedom for all people in American including women and gays. Commitment to a good cause can be a good thing.

Oppose evil. Fight evil physically if you have to. Sometimes you have to bear the burden of fighting evil so that other people can lead decent lives. Don't become evil when you oppose evil. Zealotry often leads to becoming evil even when it begins by opposing evil.

There is no magic formula. We all make mistakes sometimes. If we trust, let go of fear, and use common sense, usually we can get along well enough.

Some people are exempt from working hard to build a better world and from enjoying the world, such as people who are physically ill, mentally ill, persecuted, quite poor, in jail, or oppressed. God understands. Sometimes you help the world best by helping yourself first. Sometimes the best you can do is to get by from day to day. Do what you can when you can.

Science is correct. To respect science is to respect a gift from God.

Search for truth. Be open to truth, even if it is not what you expected and are used to. Rely on truth to take you to goodness. Follow the truth. From Jesus, "The truth will set you free".

If you open yourself to the truth, trust God, and-or open yourself to God, and work toward getting better yourself, then you will get better. You will find out about yourself and the world. You will learn how to be better. You have to do most of the work yourself but the work will get done. You will get some help from the world and from other people. God might give you a little help but will not do it all for you. You will not find heaven on Earth, you will not solve all your problems, and you will not save the world, but you will find enough so you can work on the world yourself.

God can forgive a lot and God can make us see that past bad deeds do not have to drag us into deep depression. Past bad deeds need not be a barrier between me, other people, the world, or God. It helps to overcome past bad deeds if you work toward atoning and being better.

Although God loves you and wants you to do well, the world is not about you. Not even the small world around you is about you. You can play a role, if you want, but that does not make you the prince of any world.

God rarely directly intervenes directly in the world. It is very unlikely God will intervene directly to help you or your group. Instead, God set up the world so we can find almost all of what we need if we try hard. "Knock and it will open for you". "God helps those who help themselves". God knows that some people try hard but still fail, and he does not hold that against you.

Religion and stances should be free of any hurtful dogmas, support for bad acts, and support for bad commitments.

Prophets are people who are particularly adept at reminding us what God has in mind. When we find a prophet, we should pay attention. Jesus was an important prophet. Other prophets include Moses, the other Jewish prophets besides Jesus, the Buddha, Chuang Tzu, Mohammad, and the great writers of India. We don't have to believe everything every prophet said.

When you die, you have to face God. God will be more inclined to mercy and education than to stern justice. Still, if you did not use your abilities while here on Earth, or if you did evil, God will be stern with you. God will not punish people who were sick or oppressed.

People do not have perfectly free will in all situations. We have enough free will most of the time to make the right choice. We can decide to be decent, follow the Golden Rule, work hard to make the world better, and mix practicality with idealism.

Often we face a tug between doing the most good we can imagine versus simply being what we are naturally and doing as much good as we can as our less-than-ideal selves. We face a tug between some unrealistic saintly ideal that is "not who I am" versus doing the best I can as who I really am. Usually it is best to be yourself and to do as much that way rather than try to force yourself to play the saint. Trying to force yourself to be a saint backfires. Most people can't be Mother Teresa; too often they do more harm than good when they try; and they usually paralyze themselves with guilt and do nothing at all. Do what you can. You are not required to save the world. It is not a good idea to go against yourself even in a good cause. If your nature is to be an engineer who helps build houses for the poor once a month, and you don't want to devote your whole life to working in the slums, then be that engineer. Be who you are, and do goodness as that person. But don't forget to actually do what work you can. You can't use "that's not me" as an excuse not to do anything but only gratify yourself.

If your nature is to do bad things, then stop yourself. If you can't stop, then kill yourself. Expect other people to stop you.

Originally Jesus said to “love your neighbor as yourself” and to “love your enemies”. We should try to love other people as God loves us. We do not try to love other people simply because God loves us but because it is good, just as parents do not love children simply because their own parents loved them but because it is good. God loves us because it is good, not because it is his duty or because it will get him to heaven. We should use God’s love as a model, just as we use the love of good parents for their children as a model in our love for our children.

Jewish teachers, including Jesus, said that the two most important commandments were to love God and to love our neighbors. From that basis, come all the ideas about good in the Hebrew Tanakh (Old Testament) and come all the specific laws. For convenience, to this wisdom, I add that everything we do rests on the Golden Rule of “act toward other people as we want them to act toward us”.

If you can really love all your neighbors as yourself, and can really follow the Golden Rule, then good for you. You are a much better person than I am. I know what Jesus was after, I see his idea clearly, but I cannot do it. Most people cannot do it. You don’t have to succeed fully at it to do the right thing and to please God. You don’t have to be perfect. If you work on the Golden Rule and “applies equally” then you will approach the ideal of “love your neighbor” and “love your enemies”, and eventually you will feel the idea behind the slogans. Even then, likely you won’t succeed fully. You don’t have to succeed fully. If we try to force ourselves to love our neighbor as ourselves and to love our enemies without first feeling the idea in our hearts, then we freeze, don’t act, get confused, disappointed, and bitter. We do worse than if we simply tried to follow the Golden Rule and “applies equally”, and we didn’t expect perfection that way either. If we hold “love your neighbor” and “love your enemies” as ideals but we don’t expect to achieve them for a long time, we will be better off and the world will be better off too.

Jesus taught other ideas that cannot be recounted here. I urge you to read the New Testament, especially the Gospels, and to read material from all the great teachers and religions.

### **PART 3: Elaboration on Some Points.**

#### **The Golden Rule, Persons, and Political Values.**

The Golden Rule strongly implies we are all equally persons and equal under the law. It supports Western ideas of free equal persons with rights and responsibilities. It supports Western political values. At the same time, it does not deny social distinctions and personal differences. Parents and children are not the same; students and teachers are not the same; and police and ordinary citizens are not the same; yet we know what to do in the contexts of those relations and still follow the Golden Rule. I return to the Golden Rule in the next chapter on my political values.

#### **Orthodox Christians Don’t Like This.**

My beliefs depend on morality, and I see Jesus as the most important moral teacher. Standard orthodox Christians don’t like this view. They like seeing Jesus as the key moral teacher in world

history but they dislike seeing him as primarily that. To them, Jesus is God, and his mission is to save us. Jesus saves us through his Birth here as God-and-Man, Death, and Resurrection. His life and teachings help. Exactly how Jesus saves in these ways is a mystery but the fact that we don't understand does not diminish that he does save and he does it in these ways.

I disagree. Jesus' teachings are more important than simply his Birth, Death, and Resurrection – even if he really is God and was resurrected. What matters is following his ideas. I went through these issues in another book (“Jesus for Most People”), so I don't dwell on them here. We don't need to settle them to get what I say. See my essays apart from this book.

For books that give the orthodox (standard) Christian view, see the Bibliography in my book on Jesus, or the Bibliography here. For a modern orthodox Christian scholar whose work is well written, not too technical, accessible, and seems to be sound scholarship, read Wayne Meeks. Read the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church or any major church. Roman Catholic writers offer short versions of the Catechism. Most catechisms are available free online. Read Gilbert Keith (G.K.) Chesterton and Clive Staples (C.S.) Lewis. Watch religious channels and religious shows on TV – they are not all silly. Old American Christianity is not really standard orthodox Christianity but most people don't know the difference. They are close enough to say: one way to know standard Christianity, as people show it by living it, a way more fun than preachers, professors, and priests, is to hear American country music and “Gospel” music. Start with small doses. I suggest the Louvin Brothers, Gospel music of Elvis Presley, and collections of classic Gospel, both Black and White. You can get the values from classic Western TV shows such as “The Rifleman” and “Bonanza” but the values in those shows are well mixed with non-standard non-orthodox values similar to mine.

### **Simply Having a Relation with God and Jesus.**

At least since 1900, Protestants have boiled down Christianity to having a personal relation with Jesus. Hindus do much the same in personal devotion to a god or avatar. I don't argue whether this Christian devotion is enough on which to base standard Christianity. I use the idea to make two other points.

First, after you have a personal relation with God, Jesus, Allah, Krishna, Mohammad, Buddha, a bodhisattva, or an avatar, then what do you actually do? You still have to act in the world. Your personal relation will color how you act but you still do have to act. For that, you need principles. You do not get all needed principles only from your personal relation with Jesus – various people who have a relation with Jesus claim to find different principles on the basis of the relation alone – they can't all be right. Besides a personal relation with Jesus, you need the best principles and need to know how to combine them with practicality. In the end, if you find the best principles, you will act on the basis of the ideas here. For acting in this world, principles matter as much as a simple personal relation with God, Jesus, or any figure. If God wants you to do the right thing for the right reasons in this world, then you had better get your principles straight as much as you get your personal relation with Jesus straight. (Some people who know the need for principles even after a personal relation with Jesus claim their church alone gives them the principles. I do not assess this claim much but I do not think it is enough and I ask you to think it through.)

Second, when you see that you need the best principles, think where they come from. If you are not Christian, likely you will not credit Judaism and Jesus, but instead credit your heroes. After crediting your favorites, think how their principles go along with the teachings of Judaism, Jesus, and the West. If you are Christian, open your eyes to how many of your principles came from the Hebrew tradition including Judaism, and from Western values even apart from formal Christianity. Think how Christianity merged the ideas of Jesus with ideas of Hebrews and the West. Recent champions of Christianity, even deeply versed in Western tradition such as G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis, don't do this enough. They credit the Church only while slighting Plato, Aristotle, and Locke. In any case, be honest about what principles you really use and where they really came from. I like to find the roots of good ideas in Jesus but to find them only there is to hurt Jesus as much as never finding them there.

### **Knowing God and Being a Good Person.**

The Proverbs say fear of God is the start of wisdom. Believers say: if you really know God, Tao, Dharma, Heaven, Spirit, Nature, the Universe, etc. ("God etc."), the knowing necessarily changes your life and makes you better; and you cannot be really better unless you do know God etc. I hope people wake up to something bigger than their selves, especially they wake up to God and Jesus, and that this feeling does make them better.

Yet I did not write to make people know God and Jesus in that way. I do not intend to set people on fire for God etc. either for the feeling itself or to use the feeling to get something else. I want people to think about principles and stances.

Some, but not all, religious people who want others to know God etc. as they do; in fact, really they want to make others just like them, want others to believe as they do, or want to control others. That is a reason why we "others" resist believers who say they know God etc. Although bad motives are annoying, put them aside for now. Focus on the issue of acting well.

The feeling of knowing God etc. alone is not enough, not needed, and can be confusing. The feeling is not by itself a guarantee that it is correct, no matter how strong and clear it is.

People who say they know God etc. (1) don't always agree on what God etc. is; (2) don't always agree on how to act better; (3) don't always keep up the feeling; and (4) don't always act better even when the feeling lasts. (5) Some of them do use the idea of knowing God etc. as a tool. People who claim to know God etc. often say: (6) people cannot think out principles and act well without first feeling God etc; (7) people who lapse didn't really have true feeling for the true God etc; (8) anyone who acts badly never had the true feeling for the true God etc; (9) our group does have the true feeling for the true God etc; (10) anyone who disagrees with us on an important point has a wrong feeling and-or the God etc; and so quite likely (11) we are the only group with the true feeling for the true superior being. Academics do much the same with their pet theories, would-be rebels with their pet social fringe, art consumers with their pet art, atheists with not-God, and politicians with their pet ideologies and projects.

In contrast, I have seen good people, who only dimly have this feeling about God etc, yet still do the right thing for the right reasons, not from fear or from hope of reward. Knowing God etc. did play a role in their good acts but not the only role or biggest role. I have seen people who have the true feeling by all the plausible standards of their church, aimed at the right God etc. of their faith, yet still act badly. You can be on fire for God, and backed by the church, yet still act badly. I have seen people act well, of various faiths, who differ about God etc, both with and without a fiery feeling of knowing God etc. In the New Testament, demons know God, what God is, what God wants, the right things, right reasons, and who Jesus was, and demons know all this more than any mere human, yet demons still act badly.

To find principles and act well, it can help already to have a feeling for God etc. but the feeling does not have to be the full-blown fire of certain knowing. A feeling of knowing God etc. is not even necessary. People can think about principles adeptly and can act well as long as they see that some ideas and acts are better and some worse, that is, as long as they take morality and practicality seriously. They do not have to link better and worse directly to God etc. Later, people can think about relations between principles, acts, morality, better, and worse to God etc. Forcing people to know God etc. so that they think clearer and act better rarely works. If we get people to think clearly about principles and get them to act better, they are more open to questions of God etc. See the chapter on atheism.

People who do not have the feeling of knowing God etc, see that the feeling alone is not enough, is not needed, and leaves us open to error, so they get confused. Even people who do have the feeling, when they see that other people who claim to know God etc. don't agree or do act badly, get confused. People who seek to know God etc. without first setting a base for right thinking and right acting almost surely get wrong feelings and get confused.

God is happier with someone who does not have a spectacular feeling of knowing him but acts well than with someone who does know him but acts poorly. God is happier with someone who does not have a spectacular feeling but tries to think it all out, and does as well as he-she can, than with someone who does know him but acts poorly.

If the feeling of knowing God etc. is not enough, not needed, often a tool, and can confuse, rather than seek the feeling first, or rely on it alone, it is better first to seek right principles and acting well. Let the feeling take care of itself. That is what this book does.

People need not burn for God etc., and can have a different knowing of God etc., without lapsing into vacuous "all paths lead to God", bad relativity, bad moral relativity, idolatry, bad dogma, bad ideology, and perversion. Knowing God etc. does not always stop those mistakes. Sometimes good comes even from Samaria and Galilee.

Likewise, not everyone who feels God etc. is conniving to turn you into a zombie. Not everyone who feels God etc. is bad. Most are good. People who love God want you to have the same feeling because it is the best ever, much the same as you might want them to love democracy, Shakespeare, the Beatles, or modern tech. They are bad when they insist only their feeling and

their ideas of God etc. are true and their feeling and ideas must precede acting well. Practice telling apart good ones from bad ones.

If you know God etc., I am glad. You are lucky. Help people without trying to make them as you are. Give them a solid foundation in ideas and acts. Let them think their own way to right ideas and right acts when they can. Let “knowing God etc.” blossom in them as it will.

To insist, as I do, that Jesus had the right principles, and he set the right ideas into the world, is NOT to say we must feel Jesus as some Christians say we need to know Jesus-and-God before we can know good principles and can act well. Here, I present principles and, at the same time, say who set them into the world. The combination of principles and history should help people appreciate Jesus and the West. The combination need not make people feel Jesus-as-God in the same way some Christians know Jesus. If it does so for you, fine; you need to consider your relation to Jesus or your role in a church. If the combination does not do that for you, then it might lead you to think how one person, Jesus, could set the principles into the world, what that fact implies about human nature, implies for the reality of God, for the character of God, and for what God wants of people including you.

Sometimes people feel God etc. on their own, without prompting, and without much context to make the best of the feeling. People can know God etc. even if they are not of your religion and church, or any religion or church. They need help to make the best of knowing God etc. by putting it in the right context. The right context is not always you, your belief, and your group. My first impulse is to show them art and cosmology, then to show them the implications of knowing God for how we act toward people, nature, and the state, and to see that we need right principles too. If you do come to know God etc. on your own, remember: Your task is only starting. Soon you have to figure out what to do, why you do it, and what works in this world.

People who feel they know God, and know they also need principles, often go to their religious organization (church) for advice. They blend feeling with reason by going to the storehouse of reason in their church. I have nothing against this way. I get a lot from religious writing. But often the church is not enough. Churches are not always right. Sometimes we need more even than an old church with a good record. I cast my net widely and I ask God's help in finding right principles wherever I can, including Jesus, other prophets, philosophers, and artists. The fact that I rely on Jesus so much does not mean I find principles in a particular Christian Church or the general Christian Church. My reliance on Jesus partly reflects that I was born into the Christian tradition but more so it reflects the end result of long search and sifting.

If you want to know God etc, or you might be getting to know God etc, here is not the place for me to give much advice. I hope to write apart from this book. Here are a few words: At first, stay away from people who are strong for or against God etc. American culture either extols “God etc. fearers” or makes fun of them; and so you have to search despite the culture rather than with its help. Don't take the attitude of neutral jaded normal people who don't really know God etc. much. Don't suppress the feeling. You can blend feeling and reason, and should. If your friends are true, they won't make fun of you for seeking. Check out groups such as Christian churches, New Agers, Taoists, etc. but don't get “socialized” into a group for at least a year. A role model is good

but modern role models of all kinds have been so polluted by wrong ideologies that likely you have to avoid obvious role models. Find simple decent good people who act well, as if they know God etc, but they don't make a big deal of it. Our times devalue simple decent good people but they are still around. They appear in all groups. Don't hold against them their lack of worldly success or strong worldly success. Read from many sources. Novels, poems, history, and even social science can work about as well as religious material. Don't confuse knowing God with social action, ecological action, rebellion, or right wing backlash. Don't confuse knowing God with any conservative ideology, liberal ideology, political creed, or art movement. Don't confuse God and country. Don't be a bad zealot. Again: Your task is only starting. Soon you have to figure out what to do, why you do it, and what works in this world.

Please keep this section in mind for later chapters on "waking up". We need something concrete to wake up to beyond the glorious feeling of knowing God etc. We need to wake up to the right things, especially right acts and right principles.

### **Some Basic Criteria for a Good Religion and Good Principles.**

A religion should make sense to almost everybody even if not everybody agrees. The religion should rest on basic principles. The principles have to follow some criteria.

(1) The principles should be clear and simple. Almost everybody should be able to see the basic principles.

(2) The principles should go along with basic decency and common sense.

(3) The principles should inspire, that is, they should be somewhat unrealistic and idealistic, or they would not be principles. They should show us a better world.

(3) Yet the principles should seem reasonable, both in the sense that they are moderate and in the sense that we can discuss them and their applications.

(4) The principles should give the basis for realistic acts even if not fully realizable perfect acts. People should be able to act in the real world toward the principles according to their situations as best as they can.

(5) We should see how to combine principles with practicality, without undermining the principles, even if we cannot fully meet the principles.

(6) The principles should support specific ideas about acting well in this world, and should support concrete acts toward good goals, even if the goals cannot be fully met. For example: making the world better by writing clear simple math books, by supporting good schools, supporting modern democracy through finding the facts about corporate welfare and personal welfare, by building houses for the poor with your own hands or your own money, or fighting evil. Principles should not merely say "believe to go to heaven" or "believe as we do". Principles should not support a pyramid scheme of "All you have to do is become one of us".

(7) The principles should support good institutions and government.

(8) The principles should be accessible to normal people. Nearly all people should be able to see the principles well enough, and be able to act well enough on the basis of the principles - even people who are not geniuses, saints, mystics, or half-crazy zealots.

(9) The principles should let us feel we are a part of something bigger than us and we can get along with the something bigger.

(10) At the same time, the principles should lead us to feel that, even though there is something bigger than me, I still matter as an individual, all individuals matter, and most of the specific bits of the world matter.

(11) The principles should never lead people to act badly such as to oppress neighbors or commit terrorism.

You should not have to be unusually smart to get the ideas of a religion or to act on the basis of its ideas. Feeling part of something bigger than yourself should not also make you feel tiny and worth little, and should not leave you open to bad ideas and people. Feeling part of something bigger than yourself should not make you feel gigantic and better than everybody; it should not make you the hero of your own system. Religion should not require a complicated vast system in which you fumble through as an obscure part or hope to blaze through in glory. You do not have to understand how the world works on the highest level to see the ideas and what you should do. You have to act well although you cannot be perfect. You do not have to be a saint to feel you are smart enough and basically good enough. Using the basic principles, you should be able to evaluate other ideas, and reject bad ideas - no matter how clever. You should be able to reject bad visions, bad systems, and bad instances of the "Word of God" when they disagree with the basic principles of a good religion, simple decency, and common sense. If you are smart and can see better than other people, then you should use your talent to explain to other people.

These criteria are why I follow the teachings of Jesus mixed with practicality and with Western ideas of citizenship and good government. They meet the criteria. With them, we all can imagine a better world even if we are not sure how to get there. We all know well enough what is going on, and have a pretty good idea what to do. We all can do something unless we are in a terrible situation. We all can act well enough to feel good about meeting God even if we are not perfect and do not expect to live forever on easy street. Some of us also have a good intellectual grasp of what is going on. You can still know what to do, and do it, even if you cannot intellectualize. We can feel linked to something bigger than us but there is no big system of which we are only an insignificant ignorant part.

It is not always clear what to do but that does not mean we need a complicated difficult obscure religion. The problems with acting on the basis of Jesus' teachings come because the real world is complicated. People make it worse. This does not change the fact that we need principles, the ideas have to serve as the basis for real action in the real world, the ideas have to be along the

lines of what Jesus taught and Western values, have to support modern democracy, and, on the basis of the principles, people can feel they tried hard and acted well enough.

Formal Christianity weaves a big obscure mystic authoritarian system. It gives people confidence only through magic texts, priests, a formal church, and its odd belief system. Judaism and Islam, and often Christianity, rely too much on the arbitrary word of God as explained by people that are often confused and self-interested. Buddhism and Hinduism weave obscure big systems in which only super smart mystics can succeed.

To repeat: All religions can be interpreted to support the key good principles that I offer here and to serve as the basis for modern plural democracy. Many believers are doing that now with their religions. But no other religion came to the basic principles and provided the support as naturally as did the teachings of Jesus mixed with Western ideas of citizenship and government.

### **Facing God after You Die.**

You face God after you die. I don't know for sure what happens then. He talks with you about you and your life. He decides what to do with you next. While alive, if you have a good will and an open mind, and you actively try to help, don't worry. People with the best religious sensibility worry least about the afterlife.

If you want to minimize issues with God after you die, then face what you can face while still alive, and make any amends that you can make while still alive. Admit bad deeds now. Admit them to yourself and in prayer even if you cannot go to the people that you harmed. Admit what good you could have done but did not do. Then try to do some of it while you still have time. If your religion has "confession", then go to confession.

You cannot bargain with God after you die. What he says goes. His "take" on the situation is the only "take" on the situation.

After most people face God, they just disappear like a bubble bursting. Some people who vanish are uninteresting to God. Some people who vanish have just been around a long while and it is time to disappear. I don't believe God promised us eternity; I don't think we can compel him to give us eternity; and I don't think we should try.

God keeps some people around after death for a while. I am not sure why he keeps some people but not others, and I am not sure what happens to people that he keeps. Some might be reborn a few times but not indefinitely. Some people might reside in a place like heaven for a while to rest - but I doubt that heaven is an important alternative, so don't count on it.

You are not rewarded or punished strictly according to your good and bad deeds. If we were, we would all be in trouble. God is merciful. He does not forgive everything, and he does not forgive repeated bad deeds with a bad will. For some people, the best reward is to look back on Earth to see the good results of your deeds, as in the movie "It's a Wonderful Life". For most people, the

worst punishment is to look back to see the bad results of your deeds. I would punish bad people quite severely; I would send bad people to Hell; but, fortunately, I am not God.

I doubt most people are reborn. If you are reborn, you are not reborn strictly according to merits and demerits as in the theory of karma. You are not reborn according to some poetic justice system of karma either.

I doubt that everybody is reborn as often as needed to finally become a good person, to be saved eternally. I disbelieve universal salvation.

You can't affect what God will do with you by worrying about it. God makes up his mind, and that is that. You have to trust God. Worrying is less effective than using your talents here on Earth as well as you can. If you must worry, and most of us must, then use worry to spur your efforts.

Although God likes good people and dislikes bad people, be good for its own sake rather than to please God. You cannot make God treat you well after you die by being extra good while you are alive if that is why you do it. Forget distractions such as salvation, works, justification, heaven, hell, a cosmic ledger of deeds, karma, and rebirth. Just act well according to your better nature.

### **Some Contradictions.**

First, it is a little contradictory, on the one hand, to "threaten" people with meeting God after they die and, on the other hand, to tell them not to think about the afterlife but to live life here as best they can and to do good for its own sake. Do the right thing for the right reasons. On the one hand, people must reckon with God after they die, while, on the other hand, they can do nothing to make sure what God does with them other than what they should do anyway. Do the good thing because it is the good thing. Why? Because God wants you to do it that way. Huh?

Second, you should act well because it is good, and not worry about God. So, logically, if you act well because it is good, then you don't need to think about God. In fact, the idea of God might get in the way of acting well. If you act well because you fear God or want a reward such as Heaven or Salvation, then you act poorly. Likely, you will "screw up". You more likely act well and will do well with God if you can forget about God sometimes.

Third, on the one hand, God loves you, yet, on the other hand, after you die, you might disappear. People who do some good are about as likely to disappear as people who don't do much good or as the people who do some bad. There seems little point to doing good.

I don't feel the urgency of these contradictions but I do see how other people can feel it. The best response I can give is:

Life is a gift of love. The guidance that we get from the prophets is a gift of love. Be happy for what you do get rather than angry and afraid at what you don't get. Use your time to live well and usefully; that is reward in itself. It is natural to "rage against the dying of the light" but rage won't do you any good, and, if rage dominates your life, your life is a waste. You had your time, you

used it as you did, and, when you die, you face up to what you did and who you are. It is not a punishment to be let go after death. It is like an eagle catching a fish and feeding it to his-her chicks, a tree dying and decomposing into the forest that gave it birth, night giving in to day so day can give in to night, the hoot of an owl fading into dusk, or the hoot of a train fading into the dusk. Sooner or later, all of us fade away completely.

It is logically correct that, if we do good for the sake of good, then we don't need to refer to God. That is what atheists say. I still think the idea of God is a good idea, is correct, and useful. If we take morality seriously, then we necessarily open the door to reasonable belief in God and to reasonable guesses about what God wants. It is very hard to be fully moral without also thinking about God. If you wish to prohibit fair belief in God, then you must also give up morality. I choose God and morality, and my choice is reasonable. See the chapter on atheism.

The situation is like an athlete who has trained under a strong coach for the Olympics and is now doing what he-she trained to do. It is like a classical musician who trained under a great teacher and is now performing at Carnegie Hall. It is like a young martial artist who trained under a great teacher and is now in the most important tournament of his-her life, like the movies "Karate Kid" and "Kung Fu Kid". The performance will not be perfect but that is not expected. The teacher will assess the student afterwards but that is not the only thing that counts. The performance counts right now as much as the evaluation after, even when the evaluation is from a master. If you worry about the evaluation later, you will screw up what you do now when you need to do it best. You can look forward to the evaluation not only to hear what you could have done better but to hear what you did right, for improvement, and to know how hard you tried. In the end, sooner or later, every athlete and performer has to give up the game.

### **One More Contradiction: Simple Decency versus System.**

On the one hand, I say a simple act of decency is better than actions stemming from systems. It is better simply to give food to a hungry person than to "give to one of the less fortunate children of God so that you become a virtuous justified saved person and surely go to heaven". On the other hand, intuition is not enough, and we need principles. Yet principles imply a system.

Systems are good and bad. Americans are more sensitive to the bad that comes of systems than the good that comes of systems, and I am American in this way. "Do unto others" and "applies equally to everybody" are simple to see but have spawned thousands of law books and millions of sermons, that is, have spawned systems, and the systems undermine the original good message. Too many simple decent people have been lost in theology and have failed to do the good they might have done. The movie "High Noon" is built around a simple act of decency, a very hard act, by a woman, an act that transcends system.

Once upon a time, Americans thought it was simple decency to have slaves and treat them well; this error was supported by a system; and this mistake also was a perversion of simple decency regardless of system. Many people think it is simply decent to fight when they feel "dissed" ("disrespected"); this mistake is part of a cultural system; and this mistake too is a perversion of simple decency. It is easy for bad people to fool good people with appeals to mistaken decency,

especially if bad people have an impressive system for support. Appeals to systematic “decency” led to rounding up Jews in Germany and Russia and to beating up gay people in America. Any theory invites a system and so invites perversion of decency and opens the door for glib people to “con” simple decent people.

We stray when we trust in systems more than in simple decency but we also stray when we think we personally are fountains of pure decency and we don’t need any help, especially not from a system or priest of a system. Self-styled rebels, people who enjoy moral relativity, extol human flaws in themselves and others, and think heroes must have mixed moral character – James Dean, George W. Bush, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, Han Solo - think of themselves, rebels, and heroes as fountains of decency not despite flaws but because of flaws. Flaws become the source of decency rather than a way to learn about it. In fact, often the best friend of simple decency in its fight against bad systems is a good system and its representatives.

Simple decent people need a framework so they can defend themselves against bad people and against their own mistakes. The best antidote to getting upset over insults is to see people in the right context and to have a solid background for your morality. To stop feeling bad about maybe getting “dissed”, feel good about yourself and your deeds. Get feedback from honest teachers and good decent people. Morality works best when anchored in sensible religion. The best cure for prejudice about any religion, morality, race, gender, age, etc. is a good grasp of (the system of) democracy. The best cures for a bad act born in a bad system are, first, a good decent act; second, principles; third, a good decent system; and, fourth, good representatives of the good system. While there were certainly bad people in Christian Churches, and the Church as a whole has some poor doctrines, the Church as a whole has worked well as a system.

When you feel your situation is wrong, and you are doing wrong, then stop. Try to do the simple decent good thing instead. Then think about what kind of system that sort of simple good decent act belongs in. Think how your system perverted good simple decency, and why people go along with perversion. Seek principles and a system that best support your good simple decent act. Make sure that your system does not have problems of its own, such as glib answers to abortion, choice, welfare, race, war, gender, sexual activity, drugs, and terrorism. Make sure good acts and good principles fit into the system. Try the system for a while, and make up your own mind. Don’t look down on other people if they find another system but do criticize them if their systems and acts are bad. This book carries out this plan.

I don’t know how to resolve contradiction between spontaneity and system at the level of theory because any theory leads to a system. All I can say is that most people can resolve this issue, in practice, if they take their time and get help from people, traditions, and experience. Learn from your mistakes and the mistakes of others. You can’t be perfect, and God does not expect you to be. When you waiver, waiver on the side of simple decency and goodness.

### **Misleading Religious Goals.**

Akin to burying good acts in a bad system is burying good acts in misleading religious goals. God wants us to do the right thing for the right reasons. Doing the right thing for wrong reasons is not

as bad as simply doing bad but still not what God wants. Two wrong ideas vex me even when they lead to good acts. One idea is common in deistic religions such as Christianity and Islam while the other idea is common in dharma-based religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism; but versions of both are in all religions and are in professions such as academia and the law.

In the first error, people do good things to be saved. I am not arguing about “faith versus works”; I don’t care about that. This issue is more basic. If we do good things for a reward, even one as apparently important as salvation, then we miss the mark, we sin in an important way. The best antidote to this misleading attitude is not to think of salvation at all even though salvation seems most important. Thinking about what you need to do to be saved is a kind of selfishness, and that selfishness blocks clear thinking (it would block salvation if salvation were most important). Just act well and salvation will take care of itself. Don’t think about “what must I do to be saved?” Think “what can I do to be really useful?” Don’t think about getting God to save you but instead think about merely serving God as best you can and letting the chips fall. If you believe in God and trust God, then you don’t have to worry about what you have to do to be saved, and you can merely do as God advises. To serve God by doing the right things for the right reasons, and to enjoy his world, is as much of salvation as we can ever hope for. There is no higher salvation. I say this point several times in different ways.

The usual form of this error is not to seek salvation directly but indirectly through justification, and to seek justification through widely-praised semi-heroic acts, such as confessing Jesus, even when your version of your religion explicitly denies that people can earn justification and so earn salvation, and even when your version explicitly teaches that justification and salvation come only through God’s Grace. People do good deeds really so they can feel good about themselves and stand out. This error leads people to crusade against abortion or fight capitalism when they don’t know much about the deep real issues. It leads people to pick fault with the police while ignoring attitudes that make crime rampant in their own group. It leads people to go on shooting sprees. It leads academics to seek fame so they can be justified and saved in their arena.

In the second error, people do good deeds to be a person who is superior, good, saved, saintly, adept, spiritual, aware, mindful, enlightened, cosmic, almost-perfect, getting perfect, educated, artistic, a leader, cool, or many other wrong images of what superior is all about. Almost always, people seek this position in a system that validates the position and seeking. Doing those things makes you a superior person in that system. Instead, in reality, it leads to looking down on other people and nature, and to vanity. Doing good things can help shape our nature and can change us for the better. But acting well does not change us into a superior being. Don’t do good things because they make you better or more perfect; do them because they are good. If they also help make you a better person, that result is “gravy”, and “better” is not “superior”. The best people don’t worry about their rank on a spiritual scale. They simply do good things; they simply do what is needed and what is in their capacity.

As humans, we cannot completely get rid of the needs for justification, salvation, and superiority. We cannot be perfect. We cannot control our minds that way. That is part of the point that I am making. But we can see when we err in these ways, and we can correct ourselves. We can back off and try something better for a while.

**Be Sensible.**

God likes people to “think outside the box” and to overcome their limitations; but God is not crazy. God does not expect you to do more than you can, or to try so hard that you hurt yourself, fail to do any good, and fail to enjoy the world. God does not want you to bother people by forcing your goodness on them so you can feel better about yourself. If you are physically sick, mentally sick, in prison, in an abusive relation, live in a tyranny, or otherwise hurt, God knows your limitations, and God expects you to work within them. If you are mentally ill, then God knows you have to heal yourself before you can help other people. Healing yourself makes the world better. Some people are not suited to working hard to make a better world, it would destroy them to force them, and it would diminish the world to hurt them. Some people are temperamentally unsuited to the stereotypical call of “God’s social work”. The world is better off if “free spirits” act freely, and they enjoy the world. The world is better off if mystics enjoy the world and commune with God, as long as mystics don’t try to force others to do the same, or think they are better. The world is better off if monks meditate. Some artists both can do their own art and can work to make the world better in other ways too. Some artists only can do their art; and the world is better off when they stick to that. Be reasonable. God is more reasonable than you are.

You can work hard to make the world better through your occupation, as do some politicians, civil servants, teachers, police officers, professors, etc. I think members of “Doctors without Borders (Frontiers)” succeed at both. But don’t fool yourself about this. If your work becomes just work, if you make a lot of money, then you can still help people through your work, but likely that is not the “more” that you know you really should do. As an office holder, if your primary job in office is to get re-elected, you aren’t using your office to make the world better. You are better off giving up your office.

If you live where the government is bad, then working to make your government better is working to make the world better. In some cases, you have to overthrow the regime, as in the American Revolution. If you can’t work to make the government better or to overthrow the present regime, God knows that. I don’t know what God thinks about revolution in general.

In a modern democracy where the government is tolerably good already, you have to work hard to be a good citizen in addition to working hard to make a better world. Working hard to be a good citizen does not count toward working hard to make a better world. Not working hard to be a good citizen does count against you. Working hard to be a good citizen is more than just voting for your party. It means working to understand issues, and voting for the greater good even when the greater good is not in your immediate interests. Not enough people do this. After you are a good citizen already, then you can work hard to make the world better too. See the next chapter on my political standards.

Here is an example of working hard to make the world better by making it more interesting, and it shows that God is sensible: the story of “Le Jongleur de Notre Dame”, or “The Juggler of Notre Dame”. In Paris, a juggler wishes to please God but does not know how. So he goes into the cathedral of Notre Dame (“Our Lady”) where he juggles in front of the statue of Our Lady until he

faints. The statue comes to life, dries his brow, and comforts him. Rather than juggle in front of a statue in a cathedral, I prefer that the juggler give a free performance for everybody in front of the cathedral, dedicate the show to God, juggle until he collapses, then someone carries him into the cathedral, where the statue comes to life to comfort him. But my mind is corrupted by the populist democratic dogma of our age. To their credit, Hinduism and Buddhism have the same sensibility as in this story; but they undermine good instincts with elaborate theology about being a superior entity in a system.

### **Meeting God Before You Die.**

Mystics do not fully meet God while still alive, merge with God, or know they have been one with God all along. I do not doubt their sincerity, their experience, or that they have important things to say. Sometimes they are misled by the power of their experience. Even though they do not know God fully, mystics do have beautiful and interesting ideas, and true mystics rarely purposely mislead other people. If you have a mystic temper, go ahead with it, but do not let it mislead you or cause you to mislead others. If you like to learn from mystics, and you feel it brings you close to God, go ahead as well. Meditate, read books, read poetry, fast, or dance. Don't forget that you have to do something when you are not "in the clouds", and, for that, you need something like this book.

You can partially meet with God before you die. You do not have to be perfect to meet God while still alive. Many people partially meet God in small ways, so the experience does not have to be overwhelming. Every prayer is a partial meeting with God. Every time you help somebody, enjoy life, you meet god. As Jesus said, every time you help any small person or animal, you do it for Jesus – which is the same as doing it for God in this case. Every time you don't help a person or animal, you deny Jesus and God. If your own experience is overwhelming, then go along with it, and try to make some good come of it. Don't demand that other people go through the same big experience.

If you have done bad things, and you want to lessen the impact when you meet God, it is natural to repent, and to talk with God about the issues. It is natural to try to meet God a bit beforehand while still here alive. While this motive is not pure, if it leads to good results, I can't say much bad about it. Understand that you might start out with this motive but end up with other motives, other goals, and other tasks. Those might be even better but a lot harder.

Artists and other creative people do not necessarily meet with God here just because they are creative. Not all ecstasy is a partial meeting with God. Such ideas about the privileged status of art and artists are misleading modern stances. I don't know which acts of creation and ecstasies count as meeting God before you die. I advise not trying to be creative or to reach ecstasy so as to be in a state of grace and to be near God. If you have some talent, then use it, and don't try to get more out of it than it is.

### **Prayer.**

Try to communicate directly with God. In standard terms, try to pray. You do not have to use formal prayers – the only one I ever remember is the “Lord’s Prayer“, or “Our Father who lives in heaven...” I recommend that you do not use formal prayers. Just talk with God. Don’t expect to hear voices back. You can do it anytime, for as short or long as you wish. You can do it sitting, standing, or lying down. If you can only recite formal prayers, do that. If you can’t talk with God, don’t worry. Just act well. If you can’t talk with God now, you might do it later. Even if you never are able to do it, don’t worry. Just act well. If it is easier to talk to Jesus, then talk to Jesus. You can pray for other people, your country, whole groups, nature, and the world.

### **The Middle Path of Strenuous Focused Effort between Apathy and Bad Zealotry.**

The phrase “the middle path” is from Buddhism. The phrase “strenuous focused effort” is from Islam and is my understanding of the true meaning of “jihad”. The underlying idea of “walking the correct middle path of passionate commitment to goodness” is from Jesus and from other good thinkers too. Jihad is the appropriate middle path when we commit to doing good acts in a good cause. Jihad is not usually religious war. It is like commitment to Jewish “mitzvah”.

On the one hand, without committed passion, without strenuous focused effort, we would not have romantic love, the American Revolution, Arab Spring, monotheism, gay rights, the women’s movement, atheism, most science, most engineering, and most business. On the other hand, in the Christian story, zealotry killed Jesus. Zealotry leads to hatred, group versus group, killing, bigotry, and much evil. In the modern world, people adopt zealotry less from belief in the cause but more to feel good about themselves. Even when the cause is good, zealots ruin it, as when zealots ruin pro-choice, anti-abortion, protecting nature, and the free market.

We need the middle path of committed strenuous focused effort. We cannot lapse into apathy or leap into self-serving zealotry. We have to combine reason and passion. That might seem like a contradiction but it is not. People do it all the time. If you don’t do that, you cannot be a good artist, athlete, or business person. For a version that is not silly, see the opening scenes of the Bruce Lee movie “Enter the Dragon”. At least, we have to think about the deep real problems of the world, our country, our group, and our family. We have to think what can be done about deep real problems and what cannot. We have to think about what we can do to make the world better even if we cannot act directly to solve the worst problems. We have to think about how best to use our talents and efforts. If there already is a group working on these causes in these ways, we can think about joining the group. If it slides into zealotry, then leave it. Jesus invited people to do this when he invited them to join the Kingdom of God. People do this all the time. We just need some balance so we can do it properly without zealotry.

## **PART 4: Jesus and the West.**

### **Jesus as Origin Point.**

The good modern way of life, including science and democracy, came from the West out of fusing Western ideas with the teachings of Jesus and with practicality. Although similar ideas appear in many religions, in their modern form, around the world, they come almost entirely from Jesus.

Jesus made these ideas important. He made them into a way of life. He was unique in making them into a way of life and in living it fully. He was unique in changing the world. Without Jesus and his movement, these points would not be important. At best, they might be silly ideals among privileged elites. They would not be the basis for democracy, good government, good citizenship, economic development, the useful way of life that is the key to a good state, and good reformers. We would not have the way of life that flowers into Christmas. We should give Jesus his due. I do not denigrate other religions but I cannot overlook the value of Jesus.

### **Personal Note.**

This story might help. I was raised Greek Orthodox but did not go to church often. When I was about thirteen, I read the Roman Catholic version of the whole Bible all the way straight through. When I was about nineteen, I read the “New English Bible” straight through, including Apocrypha. I have since done the same a few more times, in various translations. Reading the Tanakh (Old Testament) first, I deeply felt that there is only one God, God is moral, and we should not stray into any idolatry. To even think God is not one is bad. When I got to the New Testament, I was confused and scared. I knew of the idea that Jesus is God from Church teachings but it clearly contradicted what the Tanakh said. I inclined to the Tanakh. The New Testament view of Jesus seemed like another Golden Calf. Rather than see Jesus as a person and assess his ideas, Christians turned him into a cosmic principle like an avatar in Hinduism, and so they too often overlook his message. Jesus was the best and smartest person I ever read, or read about, different from anybody; and his message is better than any other message; but that didn't make him God. I put the issue inside to cook. Eventually I had to face Jesus, including the claim that he is God. I learned that the Old and New Testaments were not literally what God said or Jesus said. I have not been able fully to reconcile the Tanakh and New Testament views. I have been able to decide what to do, and I have learned to trust God and Jesus.

### **Message of Jesus.**

Most of the points given above can be traced back to Jesus. Some of Jesus' important ideas that I want to stress are below. If you need facts about Hebrews, Israel, Jews, Jesus, religions of the Middle East, Classic World, early followers of Jesus, or early Church, see the Bibliography here or in my book “Jesus for Most People”. Most points of Jesus' message already were in Judaism and many can be found in other religions. His message is unique not so much in specific points but in commitment, clarity of vision, importance of acting from the heart rather than any ideology, and using the ideas as the basis for a way of life. I do not explain how Jesus came from Judaism, how similar he was to Judaism, or how he differed. Jesus teaches more than I say here. It is not hard to read all of the Gospels; it can be done in a few hours.

1. The Golden Rule: do for other people as you would have them do for you. Act pro-activity. Pay it forward. The philosophical version of the Golden Rule is “applies equally to everybody” and “treat everybody as a person regardless of wealth etc”.

2. The Kingdom of God. See below.

3. God loves us each in particular as individuals. God loves you.
4. We should love other people like God loves us, as much as we can.
5. Trust God, other people, and ourselves. Usually we can do what we need to do if we let go of fear and if we trust. Usually we get what we need to get if we let go of fear and if we trust.
6. Mercy. Show forgiveness with few requirements.
7. The importance of intentions. Here is where we see an emphasis on the spirit of the Law.
8. Treat everybody as a person regardless of wealth, power, social status, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, etc.
9. Include as many people as possible. Include sinners and other marginalized people. This is an intrinsic part of “applies equally to everybody”, the Golden Rule, and “treat everybody as a person regardless”.
10. Act on the basis of ability, to the full extent of ability. Try hard. You cannot do more than that. God expects more from people with greater ability, wealth, and power.
11. There is no magic ritual, formula, set of rules, or set of laws to establish and maintain a relation with God. We must respect laws but we have to trust God more.
12. Non-violence, with few exceptions.
13. Allow other people to hurt us rather than that we should hurt them, even to defend ourselves, our family, what is right, or any property. We should trust God to advance the cause of right if we cannot do it ourselves other than through violence.
14. You should be willing to sacrifice a little bit so that the common good for everybody benefits even more. If you sacrifice a little bit in this way now, you are likely to receive even more in return later as a result of society and life becoming better. But even if you do not, be willing to give up a little for the common good.
15. God is bigger than any ideology, program, law, or theology. God is bigger than evil. God is even bigger than Jesus.
16. God invites you to join the world and to enjoy it if you can. Enjoy it in your own way but do not hurt other people. Understanding that there is a God and he cares about you can be a great joy. Even when we are in distress such as when sick or in prison, we can sometimes take comfort from knowing that God cares about us and can feel joy in the world. If you cannot join and enjoy because your own distress is too much, God still understands and still cares.

17. Individual people are precious. Your integrity as an individual person is the most precious part about you, more precious to you than all the world. Following the above points helps you to maintain your integrity. Failing in any of the above points can undermine your integrity. You can call your individual integrity your “soul”; but Jesus probably did not think of individual integrity, and even of the soul, in the same ways that the modern Christian term “soul” conveys.

18. If you understand all of Jesus’ the message, then sometimes you can cut through silliness, personal problems, ill will, clinging, setbacks, and handicaps of yourself and the world to a sudden insight.

I learned Jesus’ message more indirectly from his parables and actions than directly from his declarative teachings.

I don’t know if people behave better when they act along the lines I listed or when they do what they think they should do as part of worshipping a god, that is, Jesus. I know I do better when I follow simple truth without folderol, when I act according to what I set out here. I suspect many readers of this book are like me. I suspect people who stress the worship of Jesus as God are likely to waste a lot of energy doing that instead of following his message.

If Jesus, as God or demigod, came back tomorrow to set things right, and he was really angry at me for not worshipping him as God, but still he did right by other good decent people who did the right thing as well as they could, then I would be happy with that result. It doesn’t matter what happens to me as long as God does right by good people, even if Jesus is God, and even if he gets angry at me. The satisfaction of knowing that Jesus did well by good people would more than make up for what happened to me. No true good God could do anything else but be good to good people. Feeling this way is enough to lead me to act right by what I think is truth rather than by what awes me, scares me, or tempts me, from somebody else’s theology.

### **The Kingdom of God.**

Jesus intended some ideas differently than his immediate followers understood him, as the early Church understood him, as standard Christianity understands him now, and as modern people understand him. We have to try to see as Jesus did. We have to go along with him as much as we can. If we disagree with him, we have to accept that problem, and make of the total situation what we can.

Jesus understood this by the “Kingdom of God”:

-Israel would be free of political control by any other state or ethnic group. Israel would not necessarily dominate other nations but no other nation could dominate Israel, and God would aid Israel in case of any conflict.

-God would run Israel. Israel had two governing authorities (other than the Romans), which were not entirely distinct: the Temple priests and the aristocrats. Likely God would run Israel through the Temple priests with the cooperation of the aristocrats.

-Other nations would look up to Israel for moral, religious, and political guidance. Other nations would acknowledge God as the one god, and acknowledge the special relation of God with Israel. Other nations would not feel lessened by being under the dominion of God and the leadership of Israel but would be glad.

-War would end, at least as concerns Israel but probably everywhere.

-Social injustice would end. Some wealth and power differences would continue but no person would be injured by them. Everyone would have a chance. Nobody would fall into hardship through the conniving of another.

-Most disease and poverty would end.

-The Devil would be defeated. The main sign of the defeat would be the end of social injustice. If social injustice persists, the Devil is not yet defeated.

-it is not clear if Jesus expected a resurrection of prominent Jews of the past such as Abraham, Moses, David, and Elijah, and/or a general resurrection of all Jews, or no resurrection. He did not make a point of it.

-It is not clear if Jesus expected himself to be resurrected in case he should die before the Kingdom came fully, but probably he did.

-People would not die anymore.

-People would be transformed to be more spiritual than they are now but not to lose their physical bodies entirely.

-It is not clear if Jesus expected people to continue to feel sexual desire, get married, and have children. I think not.

-People, especially Jews, would change their thinking and behavior to accord with the new way of life of the Kingdom. They would change in accord with Jesus' message as above. This is the most important point about the Kingdom.

-Jesus expected to be the major instrument by which God would start the Kingdom, and he expected to play a major role. He did not expect to be King but he probably expected to be the major prophet speaking to the Temple priests.

-Anybody who followed Jesus and acted as if the Kingdom were here would already be in the Kingdom and would be like Jesus as an instrument that brought in the Kingdom. Followers would change their behavior to be as if they were already in the Kingdom. It is not clear if their bodies would change before the full coming of the Kingdom. Followers both already lived in the Kingdom and brought it in for other people. This is the second most important point.

-All Jews would participate simply by being Jews. It is not possible that any Jew would see the changes and not wish to participate fully as a good Jew.

-The Kingdom was primarily for Jews. All of Jesus' original followers were Jews. Non-Jews could participate as much as they accepted God and the leadership of Israel. They did not have to convert to Judaism, but, if not, some benefits were not available, such as close communication with God through Temple priests. I am not sure what all benefits were available or not available to non-Jews. Non-Jews could fully belong by converting to Judaism.

-If any non-Jew did not fully accept all changes, he-she would be excluded. It is not clear what exclusion meant but probably it meant social ostracism, isolation from God as had happened to King David, and then death without possibility of resurrection.

-There was no Hell in the Christian sense.

### **Beneficial Early Church Modifications of the Message of Jesus.**

If you know traditional orthodox Christian doctrine, note how the above differs. Note differences from popular ideas of Jesus. Most Christians wrongly take the message of Jesus to be: if you believe in Jesus as God strongly enough and worship him through the Church diligently enough, then, after you die, you will go to heaven to be with Jesus and your loved ones forever. I do not explain all the points of difference.

Jesus died because the Roman and Jewish authorities became annoyed and wanted to prevent any unrest. They killed Jesus about the year 35 in the Common Era (CE or AD). Jesus' followers were frightened and confused. They had to stop all talk of a political-religious kingdom and they had to explain why Jesus died before the kingdom of God came. Fairly quickly, non-Jews began to join the movement; fairly quickly, non-Jews outnumbered Jews; and then by about 100 CE, no Jews were in the movement and the entire movement was non-Jews.

Because the movement had to suppress talk of a political-religious kingdom, and because non-Jews became central, the movement re-interpreted the kingdom to mean an organization focused on faith and non-political behavior, and the movement gave full membership benefits to non-Jews without requiring conversion. At first, the movement redefined benefits to mean resurrection and eternal life. When resurrection did not happen, for most people the Church eventually redefined the benefits as going to heaven to be with Jesus.

Because the early Church redefined the movement, the scope of membership, and the benefits, we have ideal Christianity: moral, inclusive, doing good, and pro-active. We have the idea of a community of good awakened people actively working toward a better world, loving fellow people and nature as much as they can. We have the idea that people who feel this way already are in a good state, and that this community will be able to change the world. The message of Jesus now applies to all people, and aims to build a better world rather to restore Israel and make Israel pre-eminent.

The message of Jesus, augmented by the Church, carried important Jewish ideas about social justice, the individual person, one God, the importance of law and morality, and nature. Jesus' ideas combined with Western science, ideas about government, and about citizenship, to make the great Western civilization that we inherited. His ideas eventually spread around the world. His message is the morality we see in much of modern art and popular culture. It dominates TV and movies. It lies behind the action of good political activists even when they say they are not religious. It is the ideal of citizenship that most people around the world work for. It is the idea of "paying it forward" and of being pro-active for good. It leads to hospitals, schools, belief in natural laws, belief in the rule of law, disaster help, medical research, sustainable development, and working to be good stewards of nature. It leads to the "Christmas spirit", good fellowship, and most of the best that we feel toward each other and the world.

By about the year 100, Jesus' movement had become the Church and Jesus had become God for Church members. In modern times, people have come back to the idea of a community and have dropped the ideas of a Church and that Jesus is God. Even if they don't belong to a formal church, people who get Jesus' message still form a kind of community, work for a better world, and try to love fellow people and nature. Getting the message makes you a part of the kingdom and means that you are helping to bring in the kingdom for the whole planet.

I think Jesus would approve of changes such as including everybody. Whether he would approve is not as important to me as that his message forms the basis of a great message, great work, and a great community, that was not available before him and his movement.

### **The Kingdom as the Association of Godly Good Guys.**

When the Kingdom did not work out as Jesus originally wished, the early Church redefined the Kingdom to be the association of people who believed correctly and who acted accordingly. In effect, the Church redefined the Kingdom to be the Church because only people who were in the Church could believe correctly and act rightly. After the first Church split, each separate Church has continued with that idea, with itself as the Kingdom.

People who do not belong to any particular Church but think of themselves as following Jesus or as doing the work of God think pretty much the same way. To them, the Kingdom of God is made up of good people who try to do the work of God and who act as God wishes them to act. These people are not necessarily insipid "goody two shoes". They work in slums or fight to clear land mines.

Even good-hearted good-minded on-the-mark active people tend to think as Churches do, partly out of frustration with how obnoxious people can be. They think of the Kingdom as made up only of people who "get it" as they do and act accordingly. They exclude from the Kingdom people who don't get it as they do and who do not act accordingly. Sometimes they exclude people from rival activist do-gooder groups and rival churches, exclude people who just will not get it and start acting better, and people who are obnoxious.

It is hard to fault people for thinking of the Kingdom in these terms. It is perfectly natural. I do it myself although I recognize it as a fault and try to stop it. In this view: the Kingdom includes, and is limited to, only people who see Jesus and see God as I do and who act accordingly. Out of my superior benevolence, I include people who receive help from me and are properly grateful. I can include people who half-way get my ideas and are basically decent but who can't make the final leap to fully embrace my ideas because of limited ability or worldly constraints.

While natural to think in these terms, it is still wrong. It rejects people, too often for bad reasons. It leads to narrow-minded "us versus them" thinking.

It is also wrong to think everybody automatically is in the Kingdom. Some people really are in, and some people really are out. This does not mean some people are saved and lost in old traditional Christian terms. I don't know how "in the Kingdom" aligns with "saved" or how "out of the Kingdom" aligns with "lost". Some people just do not get the ideas well enough. I don't know how to draw lines between the people who are in and the people who are not; and I don't worry about it too much. God makes that call. I try to enjoy people who get it, decent people, people who might not get it entirely but act well, enjoy people who make the world interesting, and deal with obnoxious people as best I can. It can still be useful to think of good people, decent people, and active people as making a Kingdom of God as long as we are not rigidly dogmatic about it.

Eventually the Kingdom of God shaped modern ideas of what a good state is and what good self-government is. Our modern ideas of democratic self-government are our version of the Kingdom of God on Earth as much as we can make it on Earth without direct intervention by God. If we did not have the idea of a good and just order from Jesus' idea of a Kingdom of God, we would never have had the ideas of a good and just state that lie behind Western ideas of citizenship and good government, and especially behind democracy and self-government. Just as all people are equal before God, so all are equal under the law and all people are equal in power as voting citizens. Just as the Kingdom of God aims at goodness, justice, and mercy rather than power and control, so do democratic self-governments. The ideas of John the Baptist about good civil servants, and the behavior of good Church officials after Jesus died, shaped our ideas about good civil servants of the people. The idea of the Kingdom of God can guide the behavior of people even in states that are not free or democratic, but it is the best preparation for when states do become free, self-governing, and democratic. I can think of no other religious stance that prepared us for good self-government in the same way as Jesus idea of the Kingdom of God.

### **Jesus as God or Not God.**

Here, the question of Jesus as God naturally arises. The simple answer is: "Follow the message of Jesus. If you do that, you don't have to worry much about Jesus as God. If you don't do that, worshipping Jesus as God won't help you". I was surprised how much this stance annoyed many Christians. I did not mean to vex them. They insisted that I follow their idea of Jesus as God and that I could not follow Jesus unless I followed him as God. Because I was raised with the idea of Jesus as God, at first their demand frightened me. Eventually I got over the fear.

### **Accepting a Modified Message from a Mere Human.**

Jesus' original ideas about the Kingdom were good, but flawed in some respects, such as that the Kingdom was coming soon, it would center on Israel, and non-Jews would not be full members. Jesus' original message about human behavior was excellent. The expanded message from the Church of full inclusion is better. The modified message takes great insights about human action and puts them into the better context of building a better world for everyone.

Is it odd to get religious insight from a limited imperfect human being? Is it odd to think normal human followers could modify the original message to make it even better? It is only odd if we demand religious leaders are God, superhuman, or perfect. Not only Christianity, but all religions make this mistake, even Islam and Buddhism. The real oddness lies not in looking for insight from normal human beings but in thinking that religious voices cannot say anything important unless they are perfect. The oddness lies not in thinking normal limited flawed humans can be improved on but in thinking they had to be fully perfect in the first place. I expect to get great insights from limited humans who do make some mistakes. I could not get insight from anywhere else unless God spoke to me directly, and he has not done that. We have to look at the ideas themselves. We have to pick out the good ideas from the bad ideas. We can add to the good ideas. Jesus' followers did that.

At the same time, be careful not to make the current trendy mistake of thinking that a message is correct only if the giver is flawed, and that a message is more correct if the giver is more flawed. Not every messenger is a flawed tortured artiste. Not all flawed tortured artistes know what they are talking about. Evaluate the message for its content regardless of source.

### **Jesus as Special, and Other Prophets.**

Every religion wants its leader to be the greatest of all time, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, and even Taoism. To do so is wrong. It would be easy for me to simply rail against the trend except I have said Jesus' ideas are best. So I have to reconcile two opposing trends of thought.

Jesus is not special because he was God, was the last and greatest of the prophets, or because his ideas were unique but because he had the right ideas and he made his ideas a positive way of life. His way of life led to the best social ideas and to the best societies in the history of people so far.

If you wish to say that your prophet is overall better than Jesus or any of the other prophets, then you need to give good reasons. You need to say why the ideas of your prophet are better than the ideas of Jesus or of other prophets. You can't simply say your guy is better because your guy is better. If you can say why the ideas of your prophet are better than the ideas of other prophets, then we don't need to argue about which person was better. We can appreciate which ideas are better, and we can leave the people out of it.

### **No Great Realizations Needed.**

You do not have to go through a great experience, inside or out, to understand the basic ideas and Jesus' message. You do not have to go through a great experience to work hard to build a better world, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, and apply all rules equally to other people as well as yourself. Many people do this without even knowing that they are doing anything special. As long as you do this, you are fine. I think people who do this as part of their character, without need for any justification, are quite lucky.

Some people do have an awakening in which they realize some connection to God, and then act well. If you have an experience, and it leads you to act well, then good; but it is not necessary. I hope, when you awaken, you come to see the ideas in this chapter, but I care less that you agree with me than that you act well. If you have an experience, don't try to force it on other people no matter how good it felt to you. Don't stupidly think you are better than other people. Don't think you know better than other people who already act well just because you had an experience. A lot of people have a great experience but then act no better or act even worse.

The Christian idea of "salvation" is misleading; see later. People mix together the ideas of having a big experience and salvation. What I said about having a big experience applies to salvation as well. You are not saved because you get the ideas in this chapter. You are not lost (damned) if you don't get the ideas in this chapter. You are not saved or damned due to any rigid set of ideas or beliefs. If worrying about being saved thwarts acting well, stop thinking about being saved and start acting well. What counts is acting well.

To act well, you likely need some intellectual understanding of working hard to make the world better, doing unto others, and "applies equally"; but you don't need a degree in theology. You can act quite well with only a basic understanding, and many people do. If you have this already, then go with that, and don't worry.

### **Christian Sacraments.**

You don't have to participate in the Christian activities and rituals of baptism, communion, mass, confession, confirmation, marriage, and blessing at death; not all Churches recognize all these practices as sacraments. If these practices are part of your Christianity, then I recommend that you continue them. If you feel a close connection to Jesus, and join a church as a result, then I recommend that you follow its sacraments. See the movie "Tender Mercies" with Robert Duvall. If you are in another religion, then what you do is up to you.

Whoever you are, in whatever religion or church, or no religion, try to see the idea of sacraments as a mixture of the divine and material. See them as more than superstition and animism. The sacraments bridge the material and divine. They are a mix that is superior to the merely material or merely spiritual. They show why the mixture of material and divine that is human is superior to the merely spiritual that is angelic. They show why even death can be a blessing. They show why angels and (in other religions) gods might be jealous of us humans. Try to see the Christian view of sacraments. Sadly, you have to keep in mind that views of the sacraments differ between major divisions of Christianity and often keep apart groups of Christians.

### **Feeling Close to God.**

You don't have to feel close to God to do the right thing and be useful. If you don't feel close to God, don't worry about it. Do what you can, including, if you can, praying. Just knowing you are trying will make you feel closer to God and feel better about yourself although it might not make you feel close to God in any stereotypical religious sense. Maybe things will change and you will feel close to God someday, but, if you still don't, still don't worry about it.

If you do feel close to God, then good for you, and you are lucky. Keep some things in mind. You are lucky rather than skilled. Most people feel close to God more for psychological reasons that have little to do with actually being close to God. I don't discredit the feeling but I do want to keep it in perspective. Feeling close to God is nothing to feel proud over. You are not more likely to be saved or to go to heaven, and people who don't feel close to God are not more likely to be lost or go to hell. If you feel overly proud about feeling close to God, you are in more danger than they are. It is alright to feel happy about it. Don't use it as a way to proselytize because you are much more likely to use it to assert your superiority. Saying "don't you want to feel close to God? It feels so good." is really a way to say "I am better than you are and I have a right to tell you how to think". That is obnoxious. Just because you feel close to God does not make you everybody's spiritual advisor. If people get curious, then simply explain it to them, and tell them how you think it happened that you feel close to God. Keep in mind the human desire to want to feel close to God, and so to think they feel close to God. Keep in mind how much other people can suffer, and try to alleviate their situation without making it an issue of being close to God or not.

### **Other Gods.**

I recognize only one God. Traditionally in his relation to Israel, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, this God was jealous. He did not like people of those religions worshipping other gods. He did not like people of those religions even theoretically recognizing other gods. In line with this old attitude of God, I do not recognize Jesus as God, and I do not expect people to recognize Jesus as God in order to follow his ideas.

I don't know how God feels about people following Jesus while still recognizing other gods. I do not recommend it. I recommend you give up other gods if you can. My wife is Thai of Chinese background. After I was married, a few times a year, my wife's mother carried out a ceremony in which she offered food and other goods to the family ancestors and then the family ate the food. My wife's mother did not think of the family ancestors as gods, and she knew this ceremony was as much for mental comfort as literally a sacrifice to spirits. Still, in the Old Testament (Tannah) prophets rail against Israelite men for allowing foreign wives to continue to worship the wives' original gods and rail against Israelite men for participating in ceremonies to other gods for the sake of their wives. The prophets blame the demise of Israel specifically on this fault. In the New Testament, Christians are told not to participate in ceremonies like this and not to eat any food offered during the ceremony. At first, I did not like being in the ceremony conducted by my wife's mother. Then, after a while, I felt that it would do no harm. I did not feel bad about it. Eventually I got to like it. After my wife's mother died, we stopped doing it, and I miss it. I think I would be alright doing it with other families who respect their ancestors as long as the other families knew

how I felt, and that I did not believe in family ancestor spirits. I would not feel happy about doing it for other gods. I do know how bad it is to create family unhappiness and how hard it is to resist family pressure. If I understand, then God gets it too.

If you know God yet have grown up in a tradition with Heaven, Dharma, and the Tao, then I am not sure what it means to continue a relation with them. It is probably alright to have a relation with them as long as you do not also worship the lesser gods, such as Vishnu and his avatars, or the many bodhisattvas. Buddhism already insists that you do not worship the Buddha Siddhartha Gautama as God, but many Buddhists break this command. You have to try out worship and non-worship for yourself, and then assess your feelings. If you can, pray about the matter. Pray to God and only to God.

You may not worship saints, Mary, angels, archangels, old monks, new monks, or bodhisattvas. You should be careful about having a relation with them so they will help you – I think most of that is misleading idolatry regardless of official dogma. Much of what Christians call “veneration” is really worship in disguise (“if it looks like a duck...”); and, if you do that, you should stop. You may not continue spiritualism-animism even if officially you accept Christianity. If you can’t stop, I understand; but you should try; and you should pray to God about this. Pray to God, or Jesus, and only to God, or Jesus, about this issue.

#### **Not All Paths Lead to God.**

Not all the ideas in every religion are correct. Some are misleading, wrong, or hurtful. The idea that we can force others to believe as we do is wrong and hurtful. The idea that we can preach joy without also working to make the world better is wrong and often hurtful. The idea that we can be above it all, and can find heaven for ourselves alone, is wrong. The idea that Israel, America, Muslims, Chinese, or any group, will dominate the world for God, is wrong and hurtful. The idea that people will go to hell because they refuse to accept that your prophet is the best, or because they refuse to accept some strange point of dogma, is wrong and hurtful. The idea that you can advance your religion by bombing civilians is wrong and hurtful. The idea that dogma is above the evidence of the senses, and above science, is wrong and hurtful.

This book champions the ideas of Jesus, and the ideas of the West that mixed with the ideas of Jesus, because they are correct and useful, and they are not wrong and hurtful. When ideas are wrong and hurtful, this book criticizes them no matter where they come from, even if they come from Jesus and Christianity.

#### **Hard World Now to Follow Jesus’ Message.**

Many people would follow the message of Jesus if they felt their effort would make a difference both to individuals that received direct help and to the world in general, the world could be made better, the world would be made better, and the helpers would not suffer too much for giving help. In the middle 1900s, many people felt this way, and there was a great outpouring of aid not only from Christian nations but from Muslim and Buddhist nations. Hindus would help too under the right conditions but, in the middle 1900s, India was still too poor to help other nations.

Sadly, things have changed. In the 2000s, although we can still do good in particular cases, we suspect we cannot help the world as a whole, we think the world as a whole is going backwards, all the help done in particular cases is not enough to keep the world from sliding backwards, and trying to help is likely to put our families at serious risk. People do not think past methods of help, such as through charity, churches, movements, and government, are working. People still want to help but they don't know what to do. When people don't feel as if they can help, and that trying to help is a great risk, then they stop trying and they feel really bad about not trying. They even get a little "wacky".

Even though we do not save the world, and the world might fail, it is still worth trying, and it is still worth trying along the lines taught by Jesus. We can't give up. If the world fails, eventually it will take down everybody, including the people who did not help at all and who only tried to make it for themselves. Even if you feel bad about the world as a whole, try to find ways to act along the lines of what Jesus taught.

This was one of the hardest lessons that I had to learn growing up, along with the lesson that not all people can be saved. Despite the prosperity of the 1950s through 1960s in America, some people saw it could not be sustained and we faced serious problems in the future. Yet people in power would not accept the situation, and even "do good crusaders" focused on their chosen groups while ignoring the overall situation. This fear paralyzed me for decades. Thinking about the topics in this book helped me to come alive again and to do what I could. I hope the ideas here can help you as well.

### **Practicality and Good Governing Again.**

It is worth stressing that we have to combine ideals with practicality and with ideas about good governing and with institutions of good governing. I talk about governing in the next chapter. We all know this world is not the Kingdom of God. From time to time, Christian leaders say this world could be the Kingdom if only states would govern along the lines taught by Jesus yet this kind of governing has never been given a chance. Bertrand Russell aptly made fun of this idea in his essay "Why I am Not a Christian". It is just not in human nature to act fully according to the ideals of Jesus. We can get closer than we usually do but we can never close enough to make a real society run along those lines. We have to accept this fact and then deal with how we mix Jesus' ideals with real human nature, with how we mix Jesus' ideals and practicality. We get a lot closer to Jesus' ideals if we accept that they are not enough than if we pretend that they are.

I am not sure but I think all religions, like Christianity, would claim to offer the best society if we let them rule the world, and it is too bad wicked people have not let them rule the world. I don't know how to judge such made-up scenarios, so I don't.

All I can say is that we have to look at historical results for guidance. Part of practicality is good governing for all the people by most of the people and by the naturally talented people. By that standard, the West stands out. The West developed the ideas and institutions that lead to best government for the people by most of the people and by natural leaders – even though Western

states are far from perfect. Western success validates the idea that Jesus' ideals, combined with practicality, good institutions, and good ideas about how to govern, offer the best real hope.

This conclusion does not mean we have to push Jesus' ideals as absolutes and it does not mean everybody has to convert to Christianity. It is easily possible to accept the message of Jesus, combine his message with ideas from your religion, and use the combination to develop ideas and institutions for good government. That is what early Christians did with non-Jesus ideas of governing from Greece and Rome, and what Christians have continued to do. But, to do this, you have to take seriously Jesus' ideas, ideas of the West about governing, and institutions from the West. That is what I want people to do.

## **PART 5: My Other Deep Values**

If you don't want to read any more about me or my Western values, then skip this part. This is the last part of the chapter. While the roots of my values go back to Israel, Jesus, and Europe, still, America developed its own version of these values, and I am an American. This part describes some of my specifically American versions of the values.

### **Oregon.**

From growing up in Oregon, in the Western United States, among mostly middle class working people and middle class skilled people, I internalized some values. My feelings for my native values are as deep and strong as my feelings for the teachings of Jesus and for other Western values such as rule of law. That might, or might not, be a good thing. My native values include: decency, duty, integrity, strong egalitarianism, dislike of inequality and rank, citizenship, honesty, love of nature, respect for innocence, protecting people and creatures that need help, honor, responsibility, fair play, self-sacrifice, self-reliance, self-control, respect for public welfare, working for the public good, we are all in it together, professionalism, don't cause unnecessary trouble, don't presume, don't stop other people from enjoying life, imagination, creativity, actions have their consequences, democracy is sacred, power is bad, institutions are bad, people who support institutions are bad, and democracy is sacred but also an institution so we live in a contradiction. My values make me a cultural cliché. I don't care. I have seen other values elsewhere in America, among other Americans, in other classes, among other subgroups, and in other parts of the world; and I like the values that I learned growing up.

These values are similar to the teachings of Jesus. I am not sure of all the relations between these values and the teachings of Jesus, and I don't sort it out. I assume that most of the time the ideas of Jesus and these values go along well enough.

Sometimes these values do not go along with the teachings of Jesus even when we mix the ideals of Jesus with practicality. For example, people who are not honorable disgust me. I have trouble seeing their humanity as Jesus wished. Jesus taught that the more you have the more you should give. So I feel disgust less for poor people than for middle class and wealthy people who have resources but misuse what they have. A public office is a sacred resource, a sacred trust. Academics have been given a gift by the public; they have a public sacred trust to seek the

truth. Careerist academics who pretend to promote the public welfare but really promote their own career have betrayed their public trust and have betrayed an office. They are dishonorable people. I have trouble with them even when their work might help the general public.

When my native values and the teachings of Jesus conflict, usually I can feel it, and usually I try to go along with Jesus as much as I can. I don't always succeed. I don't think God expects me to succeed all the time. Issues with these values, and issues with conflicts between these values and the teachings of Jesus, have been so belabored in the popular media that I don't go into it in this book. Watch any good cowboy movies, detective movies, sci-fi epics, or films noir. You can start with "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" by John Ford.

Part of growing up in Oregon in the 1950s and 1960s was watching the TV and movies of that time, and listening to the music. I am also a product of ideas that came from TV shows such as "Leave it to Beaver", "Andy Griffith", "Maverick", "Bonanza", "Twilight Zone", "CBS Playhouse", "77 Sunset Strip", and "Batman", and the ideas that came from rock and roll, rhythm and blues, folk music, pseudo-folk music, the Beach Boys, the Beatles, the Who, and, later, New Wave. I always saw these ideas as going along with the values that I learned in Oregon even though I knew the fit is not perfect. The fit is close enough so that it all reinforced itself.

In the next chapter, these values show up in the context of my politics. In a later chapter, I write about decency and indecency.

### **Nature.**

I like nature and I deeply regret what people are doing to nature now. Nature was a gift from God that we are biting off, chewing up, shitting out, and throwing in his face. God doesn't like that. We should treat nature, animals, and all life, almost as we treat human persons and God-as-person. I say this not because I have a romantic idea of nature, worship nature, want to preserve all nature intact, or I want to use crusading for nature as a way to justify myself.

The romantic idea of nature that prevails among some Westerners and some people from the Far East was not originally in Christianity or Greek thought. Jesus did not teach much explicitly about nature, nor did the early Church. Jews saw nature as the direct creation of God, as close to God, and as originally good. Jews had much respect for animals. They condemned the bad treatment of animals. I am not sure how much their attitude came from seeing nature as the creation of God. Jesus did say God knows each sparrow, and notes the dying of each sparrow, individually. The Modern near-worship romantic view of nature arose around the Renaissance and flowered in the 1700s and 1800s. For a charming account, read "Orlando" by Virginia Woolf. The romantic view of nature might have had some roots in Celtic thought and it certainly had roots in growing unhappiness about over-civilization, industrialization, and capitalism. Here is not the place to go into the question of its roots.

In any case, when the Church expanded the idea of what counts as a person to include all people regardless of gender, wealth, social status, power, age, etc., the Church also opened the door eventually to include nature, and especially to include animals. Although the modern attitude has

roots other than in the Church expanding inclusion, the modern attitude could not have developed without the Church expanding inclusion. People who revere nature now are the descendants of Jews, early Church thinkers, and Christianity whether they know it or not. I think Jesus would like this trend. Nobody who sees panda, tigers, giraffe, or elephants on the news can doubt we have expanded our idea of persons to include animals. If you doubt that we have expanded our idea of plants along lines of our idea of persons, think of giant redwoods or old pines.

The fact that modern reverence for nature has roots in Jewish ideas or Church doctrine does not mean much either way any more than the fact that modern reverence for nature might have roots in Celtic culture means much. What matters is a clear view of nature, seeing animals and plants somewhat like persons, working for nature as we work for people, and not using nature as a way to justify ourselves.

While I am happy we expanded our idea of a person to include animals, plants, and all of nature, we should keep in mind that animals, plants, and nature-as-a-whole are not persons like human persons or like God. To keep in mind differences not only protects us from the silly mistake of seeing a dandelion on the same footing as a child – and thereby inviting bad backlash - but also protects nature by keeping us from seeing it wrongly. The clearer we see rhinos and all of nature the more likely we are to do the right thing for rhinos and all nature. A clear view of nature easily can include deep respect akin to what we have for persons.

### **Christian Charm.**

Here I use the term “Christians” to include Christians who follow Jesus as God and people who follow the teachings of Jesus without necessarily taking him as God. I use the term “values” to include practices that go along with the values.

Apart from the message of Jesus as explained above, Christians have values that most of the world now finds charming. The values come from the Semitic base culture of Jews and Arabs, Jews in particular among Semites, Jesus in particular among Jews, early Christians of many origins, Europeans, Europeans in America, and Americans. I can't untangle what came from where. I think Jesus would approve of these values, and I can't untangle what he would approve from what he might be a bit about, so I don't try. In the list below, I duplicate from above.

Religions and peoples other than Christians have these values although they do not have them as a full set and as the basis for their world and action. Christians rarely live up to the values. I do not point out when Christians fall short. I do not speculate on how well Christians have to live up to the values for the values to characterize Christians and for the values to be successful.

-Christmas. Christmas is the best example of what makes Christianity and the West charming. There is nothing like it in other traditions. Nowadays Christmas is not about the birth of Jesus. Christmas is about acting on universal siblinghood. It is about being one big family. It is about making other people happy even at your own expense. It is about the giving rather than the gift. It is about getting along in one society together. It is about all the other charming Christian values

rolled into one holiday. You can celebrate Christmas while not even believing Jesus was God. Celebrating Christmas says nothing about whether you think Jesus was God.

-Intentions matter in both Christianity and in the West. We take into account what people did but we also take into account their intent. This attitude has two edges. We ease up on people who did not have bad intentions, or had good intentions, but we insist that those intentions really be not bad or really be good. We look for real intentions, not feigned intentions or stated intentions only. If you want your intentions to be considered then your heart had better be real. So taking intentions into account also leads us to consider people on a deep level.

-Moral growth is as important as face-value moral actions. It is important that a child share her cookies, as on a well-done Keebler ad, but it is as important that a child learn to share. A child who starts out selfish but learns to be good is likely to stay good and she/he gives more delight to the people around him-her than a child who is never tempted. In the movie "Pulp Fiction", the character played by John Travolta does not grow morally despite having chances to do so while the character played by Samuel L. Jackson does grow even if he is not perfect. The Travolta character dies while the Jackson character lives. The characters played by Bruce Willis and Ving Rhames also grow morally and so flourish in the end despite initial conflict. In "slasher" movies, the "kids" who get stoned, have sex, cause trouble, and do not grow morally, die, while the kids who can control themselves and do grow morally live and defeat evil. Americans and Christians think these results are just fine.

-Jesus said people rejoice more over recovering one lost sheep than over the ninety-nine that are not lost and over recovering one lost coin than over the nine that are not lost. In the great movie "Casablanca", the husband of the heroine is a great moral hero who has always fought for the good. We are not surprised when he continues the fight even at great cost. The ex-boyfriend of the heroine, Rick, played by Humphrey Bogart, usually did not care much about morality or about other people, yet he "finds himself" and he sets out to work hard to make this world a better place. We are happier for Rick's change of heart and his salvation than for the "mere" continued bravery of the heroine's husband. This is strong moral growth.

-Maybe from the same sense of preserving, Americans do not abandon somebody without great reason. We might have to insulate bad guys to keep them from doing harm but we really don't want to give up on them. They might have a change of heart. This attitude can go to extremes and lead to error, such as enabling bad guys. In a good way, this attitude leads Americans never to abandon dead soldiers or prisoners. This practice also can go too far but it is probably better to keep the value even if it leads to mistakes sometimes than to lose the value and instead to calculate gains and losses habitually; see the movie "Blackhawk Down". I am not sure how wide this value is spread among Christians.

-Jesus urged people not to limit themselves to people and things that they already knew but to be open to people unlike them and to unfamiliar situations. He urged people to be open-minded, curious, and accepting. We should not reject other people and other ways as long as they do not clearly hurt us. Try out new ideas and new customs.

-Americans in particular, and Westerners in general, like new things. In fact, they make a fetish of new things. They prefer the new to the old even when the old is just as good or when the old has a lot of value left. I don't know if this attitude is an extension of Jesus' willingness to accept what is not familiar. This attitude drives American innovation and creativity.

-“Cleanliness is next to godliness”. Until recently, Europeans and Semites, including Jews, were not known for cleanliness. Jews and other Semites did have frequent ritual baths as part of their religion, and Pharisees might have been as clean as American suburbanites. Now, Americans, Thais, and Japanese are by far the cleanest people I have ever met. American bathrooms are the wonder of the non-American world. I am not sure how admirable hyper-cleanliness is in the grand scheme of things but I have come to appreciate Thai and American cleanliness.

-Christians look out for other people, even for people they don't know and for people who might be bad and might be enemies. I know of no others who carry out this attitude as consistently and as usefully. They take the parable of the Good Samaritan seriously. The institutionalized form of looking out for other people includes hospitals, charities, and schools. Most looking out for other people is done on the personal level of friend-to-friend.

-The Christian attitude of caring for other people builds strong communities. You don't have to be a member of “us” to be taken care of, but, among people of one community, the attitude of taking care of others leads to strong communities built not out of political or military obligations, fear, or guilt, but out of mutual cooperation. The downside is busybodies but we can overlook them for now. One of the best examples of this attitude still is the classic movie “It's a Wonderful Life”. The movie still is correct and still is a great example even if it has been shown far too often on TV. The idea of community can be appropriated and twisted by any group (Nirvana: “Smells like Teen Spirit”) but that does not make the idea wrong. It is appropriate to rebel against misuses of the idea but not against the idea.

-The combination of cleanliness and caring leads to clean communities, houses, yards, streets, neighborhoods, and to no littering. Until you have lived where people are not clean and garbage covers streets, you cannot understand how wonderful public cleanliness is. Clean cars do not make up for dirty houses and streets. The fact that Christians value public cleanliness makes the dirt of American cities all the more tragic and disgusting. Of all peoples that I have seen, only the Japanese might be cleaner than American Christians, although the Koreans seem clean too, I have little personal experience with their villages and small towns, and many Koreans are good Christians.

-Community extends to include nature. The Jews respected animals as God's creatures, they did not abuse animals, and their attitude carried over to Christian ideas about nature. Westerners used to worship nature in a way that Jews did not. Even now, Western nature worship can be a little creepy and sometimes it leads to bad ideas about the cuteness and kindness of nature. The Western attitude of nature worship might show up in Celtic and Wiccan religions. Virginia Woolf makes fun of Western nature worship in her short novel “Orlando”. The modern Christian attitude is a combination of Jewish and Western ideas. It is not quite worship and it leads to a healthy respect for nature, a desire to know real facts about nature, and a desire to help the planet. That

is what we see on “Discovery”, “Animal Planet”, “National Geographic” and the “Nature” specials on PBS. It leads to studies such as Jane Goodall’s long-term study of chimpanzees.

-Christians traditionally support the underdog in conflicts with over-dogs. In Christian societies, there is no shortage of the poor going along with the rich in practice and the poor hurting other poor but at least there is an ideal of supporting the underdog and it comes out sometimes in real acts. This is such a big theme in pop culture that I don’t go into it here.

-Jesus favored the poor over the rich. He did not disdain the humanity of rich people, he wished them all-the-best, and he was glad to eat free at their table; but he did not trust them because he knew that they had to make serious compromises to make wealth and keep it. He did know that the poor were corrupt as well.

-Christians still have a soft feeling for the poor and try hard to help the poor out of poverty without making the poor feel more miserable. Ideally Christians try to help the poor by teaching them how to make a living but sometimes you just have to help the poor by giving them food, clothes, and shelter. Since the rise of the comprehensive state (personal welfare and corporate welfare) in the 1800s, Christians have tried to help the poor through state programs. This way of helping the poor leads to dependency and abuse just as helping business leads to dependency and abuse. Christians have to find the right way to in help the poor.

-One of the great themes of the Old Testament is social justice, of which helping the poor is only a part. Christians inherited the concern for social justice. Of course, since the Church became an established part of the state, and the rich control the state, sometimes Christians do not act on the concern for social justice as much as they could. Since the rise of capitalism, often it is hard to figure out how to act to achieve social justice. Still, Christians have never let go of the ideal and they act on it when they can. This ideal too can lead to dependency and abuse.

-In traditional Israel, as with other traditional states, there was no separation of church and state. The state was the agent of social action, which means the state should be the agent of social justice. Christians still look to the state to be the agent of social justice even when they respect the modern separation of church and state. This is why Christian nations pioneered the social programs that have caused such anguish in the United States and have caused great benefit as well.

-Perhaps as part of nature worship, Western Christians also worship innocence. We think it is a positive thing in itself, like a state of grace. We attribute innocence, usually falsely, to people and animals that we want to admire and raise up, such as children, Bambi, Thumper, tiger cubs, girls, women, Boy Scouts, handicapped people, and non-White ethnic groups.

-American Christians, at least, and now most Americans, assume innocence and take people at face value. At first, Americans trust people. This attitude of American Christians is well-known internationally and sometimes people make fun of Americans for it. Even Americans make fun of Americans for it, as Henry James did in his short story “Daisy Miller”. Yet most people appreciate this value and most people seek out Americans because other people know Americans will give

them a chance and will treat them fairly. Americans get taken advantage of less than you might expect.

-Forgive as much as you can. I have found other ethnic groups such as Thais and Chinese to be at least as forgiving as American Christians but at least Christians hold the value and act on it when they are reminded.

-You have to be willing to sacrifice yourself to make society better. This applies to high and low, rich and poor, and smart and average. You have to be able to see the greater good, have to see when the greater good outweighs the good of yourself and your immediate group, and have to be willing to choose the greater good. This idea is not nationalism in disguise. What you choose is the greater GOOD not the greater society. The greater good can show up at many levels other than the nation, from the family to the community to the cause of a group such as gay people or unborn children.

-Offices are sacred, so you have to carry them out honestly and fully. In effect, every office is a priestly position. When you hold an office, you are a priest. Not to carry out the full duties of your office honestly is to betray holiness and God. Offices include not only obvious high offices such as President of the United States but all political offices down to meter reader. Offices include not only political offices but also jobs and professions such as plumber, teacher, doctor, police officer, and business person. Each office has a code that you have to accept and carry out.

-Christians gladly offer help and, when they need help, Christians also know how to take help. At the same time, Christians are self-reliant. Don't be a burden to other people, either personally or through the state. Don't cause harm that other people have to pay for. Don't take help that other people might need more than you do, and which, if you take it, they might not get it. If you can find a job, then don't take unemployment, welfare, disability, food stamps, or free food. Don't accept state help for your business whether your business is large or small. Don't send lobbyists to the state capital or to Washington.

-So as not to be a burden, not to need help, and to be able to help when others need, look ahead. Don't get into bad situations unless you have to. If you have to take a risk, try to have reserves to cover your own ass. Wayne Shell, a friend of mine, said that the merchant in the story of the Good Samaritan broke this rule when he knowingly went into an area of bandits. Whether he did or not, I cannot say, but, whether he did or not, other people don't have an excuse to be stupid. If you are too young, don't get pregnant or get a girl pregnant. If you can't hold a steady job with a high enough salary and some benefits, don't have children. If you have a genetic defect or you have a condition that is likely to be passed on to your children, such as diabetes or obesity, then don't have children. Make sure you can pay for the education for all your children.

-Until recently, for many decades, Christians were by far the greatest givers on Earth. Charity is a duty and a privilege. Charity is not just giving alms to some local starving person in the hope of earning religious credit ("merit") but doing something to really help. If we count actions as well as money donations, Christians likely still are the greatest givers. Charity is figuring out why that person got in trouble to begin with, and then doing something to get him-her out of trouble and

doing something else to make sure others like him-her don't fall into trouble. Charity is both an individual personal act and something you do through organized institutions such as Red Cross and United Way. Whenever I see them in action, I am deeply impressed by the willingness of Christians in the Midwest and South of the United States to personally put in hours and labor to help people, even people they might not otherwise approve of.

-All successful civilizations have valued education and all successful groups within civilizations have valued education. I am not sure Christians stand out except that Christian, beginning at about the same time as the rise of capitalism, set up public schools to make sure that nearly all children received a decent education. As with hospitals and good government, Christians set up institutions to back up their values. Given the long history of good public education in the United States, the decline of public education here beginning in the 1980s is a great tragedy and likely a disservice to God. If your ethnic group or religious group does not support education at the personal, family, and institutional levels then you are a burden on other better groups and on the state as a whole. Education is not about producing compliant citizens of a big state but about teaching people how to think so they can see to the root of problems and figure out ways to solve problems. This is another form of charity and of carrying out your office as a citizen.

-Christians have fun. They encourage people to have fun. They enjoy it when other people have fun. Fun is not a duty. Fun is just fun. According to Paul McCartney, "fun is the one thing that money can't buy" which means it is what you can't force. Christians don't worry about going to hell, and so they can enjoy themselves while they are on Earth. Christians make the world more interesting.

-Christians know we all make mistakes and that we all have to do things that we are not proud of. Sometimes "questionable acts" (Roy Blatty (Rutger Hauer) in "Blade Runner" and Tom Donovan (John Wayne) in "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance") can make the world a better place too as with good acts based on good intentions. We can't let bad guys run wild but we can be realistic and we can appreciate all kinds of people and all kinds of contributions.

## 02 Basic Politics

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

### **Introduction.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Ethnicity, Values, and Behaviors.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **PART 1: The Real American Dream.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **PART 2: Values about People and States.**

### **Where Values Come from and How to Judge Them.**

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

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

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

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

### **General Morality, General Order, and General Welfare Again.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **The Standard Civic Values.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **PART 3: Good People.**

#### **General Culture and Political Culture.**

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

#### **Background.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**General Character.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **PART 4: Traits of a Good Citizen.**

##### **Five Specific Traits.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Good Citizenship Takes Work.**

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

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

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

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

### **Good Citizenship Requires Looking Beyond Yourself.**

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

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

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

### **“Just Say ‘No’”.**

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

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

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

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

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

### **Instances of My Group versus the Country.**

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

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

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

Examples include:

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

## **PART 5: Comments on Institutions and Values.**

### **Good Institutions.**

See comments above about political culture and general culture.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Not Enabling; the Golden Rule (1).**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Individuals and Equality; the Golden Rule (2).**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **PART 6: Failing Democracy and Its Lessons.**

### **Failing Democracy.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **What is Wrong Now.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Into this ideal, inject some real facts:

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

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

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

-People feel community within groups but not across groups.

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

-People fear.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Repeat: If these Values Fail, Why Support Them?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**No Plan of Salvation here.**

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

## 03 Evolved Human Nature

### **PART 1: Introduction.**

This chapter can be short (30 pages) if you need only the basics of evolved human nature. Portions that you may skip are noted. “State” means a large political unit, usually a nation such as France, not a single state in the United States.

We need an honest realistic view of human nature to: (1) blend the ideals of Jesus with practicality and Western values, (2) assess stances from any source, (3) blend ideals from any source with practicality, and (4) build a just enduring state.

For an honest realistic view of human nature, we must accept that human nature evolved. We can't see human nature truthfully if we don't accept that we evolved sentience, intelligence, much of our character, and our abilities for religion, morality, art, social life, and political life. If we do not have an honest view of human nature, one that accepts evolution, we will make bad mistakes in government and religion.

As of 2016, what we know of human evolution is not enough on which to build good enduring economies and states, or to say why any religious stance feels right or wrong. We have to rely on wisdom from the past, experience, and our evolved ability to think. Still, knowing evolved human nature helps. What we learn of evolved human nature goes well with empirical-practical-yet-hopeful views.

This chapter gives some background on human evolution. This chapter does not find biological reasons for every quirk that makes us inept or adept citizens, able to see a particular religious vision or not. You have to fill in details. You have to use your evolved mind.

This chapter and this book assume: (1) (a) evolution is real, (b) humans evolved; (2) (a) God exists, (b) God created this world (through the Big Bang), (c) God made natural laws such as gravity, (d) set values for the laws such as the gravitational constant, (e) used evolution to create life on Earth, (f) used evolution to create people on Earth, (g) and used evolution to create life and sentient-moral-religious-aesthetic beings on other planets too. You can use most of my conclusions about human nature without sharing my view on God or evolution but it is up to you to say why human nature is as it is.

Morality and religion are part of our evolved human nature; they were not added on to our evolved nature. God did not reach down magically to make us moral and religious. God used evolution to give us genes for sentience, morality, religion, and art. God made sure evolution, and it alone, would be enough to give us the needed genes. After having set up natural selection, God did not reach down magically to override natural selection to add specific “super” genes for morality and religion. God would not interfere, and did not need to interfere, after he had set up a beautiful arena – Earth - in which life naturally evolved genes for sentience, morality, religion, and art.

I focus on the evolved capacity for morality and I touch on religion. “Natural selection” and “evolution” are the same here. I do not explain how they work. If you do not know how natural selection is an automatic process, then please read about it. A “Darwinist” is anyone who uses evolutionary theory, including most biologists and some anthropologists. Any account of human evolution needs much hedging. I give most of mine on the Internet rather than here.

Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) and David Hume (1711 – 1776) are relevant here and worth reading in the original. Both wrote clear short books summarizing major points. For specialists and for people who want to “really get into” the role of ideals in human life, please read Plato’s “Parmenides”.

### **Prolog on Evolution and Human Social Life.**

People evolved genetically based capacities for morality and religion in general; people did not evolve the genetic basis for any specific moralities and religions such as the warrior code, Taoism, feminism or right wing ideology. We evolved few particular features of morality or religion “ready-made” or “hard wired” such as the desire to worship a Golden Calf. It is not useful to argue here about which features might be almost “hard wired” or almost entirely plastic (learned).

Some features appear often and are important in morality and religion such as the idea of a person, the Golden Rule, “applies equally”, giving back and forth, the idea that many things have “spirit” or “life”, and “us versus them”. Usually their scope is not the same between moralities, religions, cultures, and periods of history. Before and after Jesus, the West saw the Golden Rule, “applies equally”, and “us and them” differently. All groups have ideas about borrowing from neighbors but groups have different ideas about what you can or can’t borrow, what you have to give back, and when. Instead of deciding whether any feature is hard wired or is the product only of a particular culture, I write about features in whatever terms suit the case, and don’t worry about that issue.

Rather than say people evolved to show features, it is more accurate to say people evolved to learn them. Genes give a general framework, some general features, a push to learn, and guides for learning; then learning fills in specifics. Learning “fulfills adaptive potential”. Genes guide learning. Genes and learning cooperate. Specifics come from a blend of learning and genes, such as the Lord’s Prayer, sharing open meals with first cousins but not second cousins, holding stories about the hearth to be sacred but not holding stories about the sky to be sacred, animal sacrifice, and giving gifts to water spirits so they return the favor. I do not explain why both genes and learning are needed, how they work together, and which is more important when. Rarely does one totally override the other.

Although some motifs run through most morality and religion, and we have genes for religion and morality in general rather than genes for any style, still we don’t learn general morality and religion. We always learn a particular style of morality and religion such as Taoism or the warrior code. We evolved to learn particular styles. Learning religion and morality is like learning language. We have a general ability to learn languages and we can learn any particular language but, except for a few gifted people, we learn only one language at a time. We get any particular style of morality or religion only by learning it on the basis of our evolved ability to learn styles. A particular style tells us when, with whom, and to what extent, to use motifs such as the Golden Rule, sharing, etc. A style gives us the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors typical of that style such as “don’t cheat on taxes”, “you can kiss a second cousin but not a first cousin”, or

“there is only one God and he is good”. Which styles we learn usually depends on how we grew up. We can change the content of a style, or switch to another, through learning, reflection, and choice. We can learn more than one style but not often at the same time. Learning morality or religion is less like learning to “stand up and self-move using two legs” generally, and more like learning to strut, OR sprint, OR run a marathon, OR power walk, OR stroll casually – but not all at once skillfully.

Human genes evolved in a social context. Most learning occurs in society. A strong lesson that people learn is a particular culture, with particular rules and values, such as American, French, Thai, or Yoruba. Even so, learning a particular culture does not simply override genes any more than any learning simply overrides genes. Genes are still important.

For a well-rounded full view of evolved human nature, we should see how genes, learning, culture, and society interact to form distinct styles of morality and religion under particular conditions. I can't do that here. I do not untangle nature, nurture, learning, culture, society, and conditions. I focus on how morality and religion work in light of evolution. If we can't do the whole task about genes, learning, culture, and conditions in one big blast, then we have to begin somewhere more limited, and it is useful to begin by taking evolved human nature seriously.

Mostly I use the short phrases “morality (or religion) evolved” instead of the following long phrases: (a) “the general capacity for morality (or religion) evolved”; (b) “the capacity for morality (or religion) results from a mix of learning and genes, evolved in a social-cultural context, and morality (religion) is learned socially-and-culturally”; (c) “the general capacity for morality (or religion) evolved but we learn specific styles of morality (religion) depending on how we grew up and what we choose”. The short phrase does not imply I do not know about genes, learning, culture, and situation.

“Do unto others” is short for the Golden Rule: Treat all people as you wish they would treat you, hope other people treat you as you should be treated (wish to be treated), and hope everyone treats everyone like that. “Applies equally” is short for: Treat everybody the same, with some provisions for age, social role, and ability; and rules apply equally to all people including you, your kin, friends, group, neighbors, and people outside your circle. If you wish to do something, you have to allow other people to do it, such as vote. If you wish other people to do something then you have to do it too, such as share and act honestly. If you wish other people not to do something then you have to accept that you can't do it either, such as lie, cheat, and steal. Treat everybody, and frame rules, as if everybody was a free adult person, who is valuable in him-herself, and can make up his-her own mind. Frame all rules as if they followed these guidelines. Act as if you follow rules that have to apply to everybody equally. I consider “do unto others” and “applies equally” to be aspects of the same basic idea. When a rule is framed along these lines, it feels like a moral rule. A rule can feel moral over the long run only if framed along these lines. “Do unto others” and “applies equally” require a fair amount of empathy and sympathy. They require that the doer be a person and imply that most of the others with which the person interacts are persons too. Ideas about “applies equally” came mostly from Immanuel Kant.

I am an anthropologist who uses Darwinism to explain human social life. But I do not write in that role. I write as a believer in God, follower of Jesus, Westerner, man, and one who accepts Darwinism. Because I believe in God, I differ from current official agnosticism in science, so don't take all I say as orthodoxy. The Bibliography cites works that represent current agnostic and atheistic thinking.

Repeat: The fact that the capacities for morality, religion, and culture evolved does not mean the content of any particular morality, religion, or culture is in our genes. No genes code precisely for pacifism, British fair play, French Rationalism, bargain hunting syndrome, fascism, Christianity, Buddhism, Shinto, Thai culture, or American culture. Some genes code for the general abilities to learn any of those as specific abilities. Our general ability to play games evolved but the ability to play golf, poker, football, chess, “thrones”, serious flirting, or any particular game, did not evolve. Usually we learn and play one game at a time – nobody learns games in general or plays basketball-chess-golf-poker. Likewise, our general ability for culture evolved but the ability to act specifically Thai or American did not evolve. It is learned. People vary in ability to learn particular games. People vary in how well-suited they are to particular moralities, religions, and cultures and in how well they learn particular moralities, religions, and cultures. In this chapter, I do not assess any particular moralities or religions. I do later in the book. In this book, I do not assess any particular cultures but, in my real life, I do enjoy American, Northwestern European, Thai, and East Asian cultures.

Grant that people are animals, as I do. Yet still people are unique. We really aren’t just another animal. It is natural to (try to) say what is unique about people and to (try to) give a biological explanation for how our unique features arose. I do not do that here. Some human features are qualitatively distinct although I do not argue what those are. Most distinct human features differ from other animals in degree rather than kind. Even so, the extent in humans can amount to a difference in kind. Honest pet owners and honest students of animal behavior know that some animals - dogs, horses, apes - have a modest sense of morality but a sense of morality that is less than among people. The deep loyalty of some dogs is not evidence for full human morality; nor is chimpanzee abilities for offenses, grudges, revenge and make-up. Animals cannot learn all the styles of morality that people can learn and they cannot play all the moral games that people can play. Still, it is worthwhile studying morality in animals, and all abilities of animals, not only because the abilities are interesting in their own right but because they shed light on how our sense of morality evolved and how it works. I suspect we will not appreciate human abilities until we have a sense of animal abilities. All I can do here is point out what is important about human morality and how morality might be based in human evolutionary history.

### **Two Important Warnings, Repeated Often.**

(1) Where an idea came from doesn’t matter. We can’t dismiss an idea because it came from another group or religion, old spouses, your opinionated brother, academics, or “them”. We can’t dismiss an idea as invalid, false, illusory, delusory, or stupid just because we evolved the ability to think the idea, including ideas such as “rocks are hard”, “trees are pretty”, “God exists”, “eagle sight is an adaptation”, scientific method, and morality. We should assess each idea on merits alone, including its likely truth and overall usefulness. Such assessment is not mechanical although there are guidelines. We have a valid tradition in the West for how to assess ideas; we should learn that tradition and use it.

(2) Avoid explaining away as “nothing but”, as when old psychoanalysis explained away sports, cooking, doing math, music, and yard work, all as nothing but sex in disguise. Explaining away as nothing but usually depends on reducing one thing to other things which are easier to explain, usually by seeing a big complex thing in terms of its parts, in terms of other things that we already know, and in terms of laws such as for gravity and electricity. Biologists reduce by explaining all features of organisms in terms of

how they serve success in natural selection. I favor adeptly done reduction yet I am leery of nothing but. Reducing is useful and often the only way to make progress, as when physicists explain a star in terms of particles. But reduction opens the door to explaining away as nothing but, and those mistakes can lead to traps, to seeing a thing only in terms of how it serves evolutionary success rather than also in terms of how it works, what it is, and its own logic. Reduction leads us to overlook the important features of things, and to overlook the independent reality of things.

Biologists, including some anthropologists, tend to reduce and explain away as nothing but evolutionary reproductive success these aspects of human life: morality, religion, friendship, cooperation, competition, culture, and society. Without doubt, we evolved the capacity for these things and they were shaped by natural selection. But they also have their own character, and we have to know each character, or we lose proper sight of how they work and of how they arose in evolution and were shaped by evolution.

Bonus: (3) (A) The opposite mistake to explaining away through reduction is explaining away as nothing but through “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”. This error is more common now with ideas of self-order, complexity, links, systems, fractals, and nets. This explanation is a reduction too despite that it is about wholes, the people who use it do not see it as reduction, and it works sometimes. (B) Some anthropologists reduce and explain away human life as nothing but society, culture, or a system. They reduce and explain away even though they think they keep the whole, fight reduction, and fight explaining away. I don’t deal with (3A) or (3B).

We have to avoid two parallel opposite mistakes: (1) Since the 1920s, some social analysts have said: “Science is nothing but another social belief system, another ideology, determined entirely by society and only by society. Science is no more real than magic, superstition, or religion.” Messy human life does affect science practice but the idea is false that science is only a social belief system. Science really can approach truth. You can’t make a cell phone with magic or social rules. To avoid the second mistake, we need to keep in mind that: (A) Some ideas have an evolved basis yet (B) sometimes the ideas are still true. So, the assertion is false that (2) “Having an evolved basis automatically discredits an idea. Any idea with an evolved basis is nothing but a delusion or illusion, especially ideas of souls and God”. Both assertions are false reductions. Both are misused to avoid sincere debate about what is real, true, and useful. I think evolutionists who assert (2) don’t always see they act like social analysts who assert (1). Ideas with an evolved basis need not be like social “brain washing”. We cannot assess the reality of God as we do theories of gravity, and we can’t come to a definite conclusion about God, but still we can think and choose. The idea need not be like magic. Don’t be fooled by either camp. Use your head, and your intellectual heritage, to decide about particular ideas.

### **Ideals and Evolved Nature.**

Some ideals evolution likely created as tools for evolutionary success, and the ideals do not exist apart from their use as tools. These ideals are illusions, or even delusions, but they can be important in human life, and we can cherish them. Evolution gave us ideals for family life, success, surpassing neighbors, wealth, power, and how great are me, my spouse, my children, and my group; but those ideals are not real apart from me and my imagination. It is not fully correct to reduce them to nothing but evolutionary practical success, but we don’t go too far wrong that way in these cases.

Some ideals and their objects exist apart from us. Evolution gave us the abilities to see them. Examples are scientific method, truth, logical accuracy, and the Golden Rule. We have to not reduce these ideals and their objects to nothing but anything, including nothing but culture, society, or practical evolutionary success (direct reproductive success and indirect reproductive success through adaptation).

Some ideals seem in-between such as Justice, honor, the Great American Novel, abstract painting, a good family, wonderful neighbors, true friends, and the perfect symphony, pop song, and sonnet. Likely there are real ideals for some art but not real ideals for romance novels, pop songs, and ethnic art. Luckily I don't have to handle this in-between case here.

Just because evolution led us to see an ideal does not mean evolution also led us to reach the ideal. Human acts are almost never perfect. People have to balance the success offered by the ideal against other kinds of success, and other success lead us to act against the ideal. We can rarely achieve perfect Justice not only due to accidents of life but because we seek other goals, such as security, wealth, power, dominance, and fame. Academics seek Truth but get confused because humans also seek security, power, fame, glory, etc.

We have to use our evolved intellects, and our long Western tradition of assessing ideas and ideals, to decide which ideals are merely useful illusions and which are real although the basis for us to see them evolved. We have not done a good job of this sorting lately.

Morality is an ideal that exists apart from us, which we cannot reach fully, but which is not unreal simply because we cannot reach it fully and-or because our basis for it evolved. Evolution gave us the capacity to see morality and follow it, but evolution did not make us able to follow it perfectly. Other needs compete. The pattern of how we actually do and do not follow morality can be explained well by referring to how morality evolved and how it served evolutionary success in our past. The pattern of how we follow morality cannot be as well explained in any other way. The facts that (1) we can't follow morality perfectly and (2) how we actually do follow it can be explained by our evolution, (3) do not mean morality does not exist apart from us. If we want to decide how real morality is, we have to use other grounds than whether we follow it perfectly, and that we evolved the capacity for it. We have to see morality in other ways than that we evolved a capacity for it. On the basis of my small skill with ideas, I conclude that morality is real apart from human sentience. I repeat these points.

### **What the Task Should Be and What It Is.**

Suppose we had a list of human traits that affect us as citizens and affect our religious and moral stances. Ideally, I should relate traits to how humans lived when we evolved, and show how we still think and act accordingly. I can't do this task here. Instead, below, in Parts 2 and 3, I give traits that are rooted in our evolved nature and affect stances and citizenship. I do not justify my assertions much. In other writing, I hope to do more of this task and to give reasons.

Optional technical paragraph: (1) Some traits are intimately tied to sentience and likely are needed for sentience such as self-awareness, and the abilities to think logically, give reasons based on cause-and-effect, and stop a train of thought that is logically unbounded. (2) Some traits are tied to sentience but might not be needed for sentience such as abilities to imagine other sentient beings, sympathize, and

empathize. (3) Some traits are usually found with sentience but are not needed for it such as abilities for mathematics, music, and oratory. It is not clear which traits needed for sentience also have to evolve with sentience. (4) Some traits likely evolve with sentience whenever it evolves and they might be needed for evolved sentience even if not logically needed for “pure” sentience such as abilities to form intent, to read intent from cues, for generative embedded language, and for morality. Think of robots that are not given these abilities but still might be sentient. (5) Some traits likely evolved along with sentience whenever it evolves but are not needed even for evolved sentience such as sexuality, gender, and one-to-one-mostly-monogamous pair bonding; life on gas planets. (4 and 5A) Some traits that evolve with sentience might be needed for real sentience and might not be practically separable from sentience such as morality, the Golden Rule, and Applies Equally. (4 and 5B) Some traits that evolved with sentience might not be needed for sentience, even if they are often found with real evolved sentience, such as the ability to enjoy beauty. Much the same breakdown can be given for other important features such as the abilities for language, art, and morality. Ideally, I should be able to do all this with sentience and morality, and show how the various kinds of associated traits affect citizenship. This task is not even close to possible yet. So I skip it. Hopefully talented people will make progress on parts-or-all of this task.

Remaining Parts of the chapter are:

- PART 2: Some Basic General Lessons
- PART 3: Optional: Aspects of Evolved Human Nature.
- PART 4: Optional: Lessons from Nature and Evolution about God.
- PART 5: Optional: The Semi-Whole Self.
- PART 6: Optional: More Implications.
- PART 7: Optional: Evolution of Religion.
- PART 8: Optional: Evolution of Morality.
- PART 9: Optional: Needed Ideas about Morality.
- PART 10: Optional: Darwinian Explanation of Morality.

## **PART 2: Some Basic General Lessons.**

This Part repeats from Chapters One and Two. Little is new. That is as it should be if evolved human nature accords with common sense and we really can mix the ideals of Jesus with practicality. For some people, this material is all you have to read. I mix facts and guesses.

### **Original Groups.**

Humans diverged from our common ancestors with chimpanzees and gorillas about 5 million years ago, in Africa. From then, we lived largely by: scavenging meat; hunting small game; gathering fruits, shoots, and nuts; and digging roots. We lived as “hunters-gatherers” or “foragers”. We used fire by one million years ago. Over time, hunting overtook scavenging. We started hunting big game maybe 500,000 years ago. Modern fully human people appeared after 500,000 years ago and before 40,000 years ago. We have had horticulture (gardening) for about 15,000 years and have had full-blown agriculture, especially of grains, for about 6000 years. Farming is not the traditional human way of life. (See Internet for more accurate dates based on recent evidence).

While we were hunter-gatherers, we lived in small groups of 10 to 60 adults and children, mostly kin and friends. Small groups contacted other nearby small groups. People could move from one small group to another, usually as families but also as young adults or adults. Small groups formed clusters. Clusters overlapped (small groups could belong to more than one cluster) and interlinked to form nested networks. Boundaries likely were not rigid. I don't explain why we lived in groups at all instead of wandering about as individuals or small families, and why we lived in groups of particular sizes.

People usually married within their small group or between nearby small groups. People finagled for spouses from within their networks.

About as often as fights happen in big city neighborhoods now, individuals fought then, usually men on men and women on women, usually in the same small group. A guess: Less often than gang fights in cities, but still sometimes, groups raided other groups, usually out of their cluster and network. After we hunted big game, groups, clusters, networks, fights, and raiding got larger. True war did not happen until after the rise of gardening and agriculture with their concentrations of wealth and people.

People formed subgroups within small groups, or within adjacent small groups, for work, play, romance, friendship, trading, drawing, music, storytelling, dancing, sport, socializing, gossip, politics, moral suasion, and religion. Subgroups were made of kin, friends, and solid acquaintances. Subgroup members were both friends and rivals with other subgroup members. People could belong to more than one subgroup but not many. The situation might be like an old style small town or urban neighborhood. Evolving people had to deal with group dynamics from the beginning, at several levels, often with overlap and cross-cutting.

### **Natural Selection Shapes Behavior and Minds.**

Natural selection shapes behavior-and-minds as well as bodies. This idea is hard for some people to accept but it is important that you do. Cats, dogs, mice, bears, bats, and people have different typical characters due to distinct evolved ways of life. This view does not discount differences due to particular genes and to learning; this view does overlook culture for now but does not discount culture; and this view does not remove legal responsibility. "Minds" and "behavior" mean "minds and behavior".

Our minds were shaped by our long evolved past as hunter-gatherers and our minds are suited to that evolved life. Our minds have not changed much in at least 40,000 years. Our minds were not formed to live in the world of agriculture, industry, capitalism, nations, bureaucracy, big business, big government, jobs, TV, movies, pop songs, processed food, the World Wide Web, identity theft, smart phones, media stars, and glamour. Our minds are quite adaptable but not infinitely adaptable. Nobody knows how much we still see the world as did our forager ancestors and how much their minds, our minds, shape how we live now. Although bodies changed since gardening and industry, minds did not. There is no "gardener mind". Gardeners use forager minds to make a gardener mindset. The same is so of the mindsets for tribal person, "working stiff", farmer, academic, business person, civil servant, and pop culture follower.

In part, our minds were shaped by the needs to make a living, defend ourselves, and build a shelter. In larger part, for at least 2,000,000 years, our minds were shaped by social interaction such as the need to find a mate and find friends. Human social life is deeply complex. It is harder to succeed as a social

human than as a forager. The bases for the skills do overlap. Hunters and social people need to assess if an organism is alone or in a group, how the group coheres, group strengths and weaknesses, how the group spreads or clumps over space and time, the intentions of various group members, who are leaders, who followers, who young, old, male, female, and other roles. Still, some tasks are harder in social life, such as judging coherence and intent. In 2016, no scientist knew definitely what skills were needed for what aspects of human life, what parts of our mind evolved to deal with material life or social life, and how much of our mind evolved what way. While our mental roots are in physical life, most of the evolutionary growth of our mind as humans had to do with social life.

### **What Counts as Success.**

Success in evolution can be measured by “reproductive success”, by the number and quality of offspring, in particular the offspring that go on to reproduce, to have their own families. Some people have trouble thinking in terms of reproductive success and linking features of life to reproductive success. If you have trouble with the idea of reproductive success, then think of “practicality”, especially practical successful family life. Include social and marital success in practicality. Success in natural selection depends on practicality. What is practical, works; the impractical does not work nearly as well or fails. Reproductive success is practical family success; and whatever aids reproductive success is practical.

Success is measured by a practical outcome. Darwinists explain everything in terms of a measurable practical physical outcome. Darwinists reduce everything to nothing but a measurable practical physical outcome. I say often: this technique is not often bad and it usually leads to huge insight but it can also lead us to oversight and mistakes.

Darwinists explain traits by reference to reproductive success. Traits that led to more success in the past are typical of a population (species) now while traits that led to less success dwindled. Eagles with far-sighted eyes became typical of what an eagle is. Penguins that could swim well but could not fly well in air became typical of penguins. Penguins that insisted on flying in air disappeared. Eagles that insisted on pecking seeds disappeared. Darwinists assume that, if a trait matters in the life of a species now, then the trait likely led to reproductive success in the past, and likely still does now. Again: this way to explain is quite effective in its arena but it also can explain away and reduce traits to nothing but evolutionary practical reproductive success.

### **We are the Heirs of Automatic Natural Selection.**

We people now are the descendants of humans who reproduced well in the past. Humans who did not reproduce well did not leave descendants to carry on whatever traits they might have had. The traits that are now human led to greater practical reproductive success in our past and often still do now. We walk upright now because those of our ancestors who walked upright well did better, and now the people who walk upright without too much back pain or too many hemorrhoids still do better. We now think in terms of right and wrong, spirits, beauty, and power because our ancestors who thought this way adeptly in the past did better than their fellows who did not.

### **Quality and Quantity of Spouses, and of Children and other Descendants.**

Among people, quality matters as much as quantity. During our forager past, a woman had about five children over her life, of which two survived to have their own families. When you have only five children, and only two survive, you put a lot into those two. The same attitude reappears among modern people who worry about education, security, and activities for each child, and so have small families.

Although our ancestor mothers usually had only five children, sometimes they responded to conditions by having more, and sometimes more of the children survived. Our ancestor mothers had more children by: (a) shortening the time between births, (b) starting to have babies earlier, and (c) having babies later in life. Also, (d) grandparents helped their children to rear their own children (the grandchildren), so their children had more children (grandchildren), and so more grandchildren survived. (1) People have more children when food is abundant and danger low, especially when women walk less. These conditions lead to rapid population growth and so eventually undercut themselves; but, while good conditions last, families are big. (2) People also can have large families when life is insecure, and people have many children to make sure some survive. (3) People have large families because they need groups for labor, and-or to protect against uncertainty, and their children are the best source. (4) Social pressure to have large families. (5) People need a gang to insure safety, and the gang is best recruited from family. (6) People need to secure large resources intact, such as big parcels of land, and need a gang to do so. (7) Families that are large can secure large resources intact, the large resources require a large family to hold, the large intact resources can support a large family, and so on, in a feedback process. (8) The state picks up the cost of having and raising children, as with health insurance, paying for school, and welfare. (1, 2, 3) Sometimes people have big families because conditions are good, then conditions turn bad because of overpopulation, then people continue with big families because conditions are bad and insecure and they use big families to make sure some children survive.

People have smaller families (revert to smaller families) when: (1) It pays in the long run to invest a lot in each child, as when education secures children a steady high-paying job with benefits. Investment in one child precludes investment in others. (2) Women have to delay reproduction, for example to go to school. Women go to school for many reasons. (3) Women cannot continue to have children late in life because they have other needs such as a job, especially women have to protect children they already have. (4) Women cannot have children every few years because they have to work to provide for the children they already have. (5) The life of each child is fairly secure, so women don't need five children, or ten children, to make sure two survive. (6) Successful people have only small families and other people imitate them (usually rich or successful women have only two children but rich or successful men have more by other "wives" that do not appear in public and so don't influence society as much). (7) Social pressure to have small families. (8) Large families are not needed to keep large blocks of wealth intact, and, beyond a certain point, large blocks of wealth do not help much in producing many children. A woman can have only so many offspring in a lifetime regardless of how rich and a man can have only so many mistresses; even when we consider succeeding generations. (9) The fact that the state picks up some of the costs of children can also work to reduce family size but I cannot go into how that happens here.

People often use wealth, power, and fame to have big families when they can. The push to reproduce, and the urge to have multiple spouses, both shaped social life when conditions allowed. In our forager past, both men and women often had more than one spouse over a lifetime due to death or divorce but rarely more than one spouse at a time. Even in later (agrarian and industrial) societies that allow multiple spouses - usually multiple wives for men - the large majority of people have only one spouse at a time.

Usually only rich, powerful, accomplished, or conniving men have more than one “wife” at a time. The push, usually by only some men, to have more than one spouse at a time, and through the spouses to have big families, shaped social life when conditions allowed. In jargon, humans “have reproductive skew” both within and between sexes and humans are “serial monogamists generally with mild polygyny and occasionally with stronger polygyny”.

Now, with class society, different socio-economic groups can have different family strategies even within the same society. Middle class people and rich women have small families even while rich men and poor people have large families. Where socio-economic class is tied to ethnicity and religion, then family size, ethnicity, and religion can all overlap.

Often under horticulture, farming, and industry, people had big families because one-or-more conditions prevailed for big families. Immigrants to the US still have large families because they feel the bounty but do not yet feel the costs per child. In the long view, big families were a recent change due to horticulture and industry, and hopefully will be a passing trend.

The state can use attitudes toward children to guide us to a family size that suits world ecology. I strongly favor zero growth of world population. So, for example, the state can make people pay for school and health care for children after the second child, the state can limit welfare to women with only one or two children, and the state can refuse support to any woman who has children before the age of twenty three. I do not favor the state setting an upper limit on the number of children, as China did, until our world grows even more polluted and short of resources.

**Focus on Individuals and Individual Self-Interest; No “Good of the Group”.**

Reproductive success is the success of individuals. What counts in evolutionary success and natural selection is reproduction of individuals. Evolution happens through the success or failure of individuals. The reproduction of small groups of kin counts a little but not nearly as much. Reproduction of a whole extended family, small group, a cluster of groups, population, or species usually does NOT count. The small local group, and the local network of small groups, can matter a bit in the evolution of morality but that fact does not change the basic importance of individual reproductive success.

Natural selection does not directly protect the species; evolution is not about the good of the species; natural selection has no direct way even to see the good of the whole species; natural selection has to work through individuals. (I do not write about the importance of variance at several levels.)

Sometimes individuals do things that are good for their own reproduction but harm the species overall. A male langur (monkey) tries to kill all infants when he takes over a group of females, wasting years of work by the females in their children. Male Hamadryas baboons herd about half-a-dozen females in a personal “harem”, and sometimes the male assaults a female to control her, wasting large time, energy, food, and water, for him and the females. Biologists can explain such traits only through individuals each seeking his-her own self-interested reproductive success regardless of the group.

By using only individual reproductive success, Darwinists can explain very nearly all features of all life, including social groups such as bands, packs, herds, hives, and colonies.

This focus on individual reproduction comes from natural selection as an automatic process. This focus has been so successful for explaining that we have to accept it as the right view.

Even so, a focus on using individual reproduction to explain can lead Darwinists to overlook the intrinsic character of traits such as morality and can lead Darwinists to reduce features to nothing but individual reproduction in disguise. Individual reproductive success can explain most of how traits arose, are used, and are sustained in a population. It does not explain what traits are, their character, their logic, and how they work in themselves. What traits are etc. influences how a trait arose, is used, and is sustained. Of course, trying to explain what traits are can mislead us into metaphysics. But, still, as thinking humans, it is usually worth the risk. It is worth trying to think in both ways.

Because successful reproduction depends on individuals, organisms evolved to think and act in terms of themselves and to think and act strategically. The focus is on me, my reproduction, and what I do. Get the job done, do it as benefits me, work effectively and efficiently, don't worry too much about others, and don't waste much time or energy trying to hurt others. This biological focus on the self includes people. People are self-interested, as in economic theory.

It is important to see that self-interest does not prevent considering others, empathy, sympathy, or, even sometimes self-sacrifice. All these things can be part of self-interest, and all of them can occur as a result of traits in human nature that helped self-interest in our past, and still help self-interest now. People join a work team or join the Scouts out of self-interest, at least in large part.

Social groups arise out of persistent interaction between self-interested individuals. In a successful long-lasting social group, adept self-interested individuals see how their welfare depends on getting along with other self-interested individuals. Sometimes, for a while, the group can dominate the individual and force the individual to remain even at some cost. But, over the long run, among foragers, groups that harm individuals do not cohere and the group cannot dominate the individual so as to prevent individuals acting in self-interest. In our past, if the group did not help the individual and-or the family, the individual or the family simply left to join another group. Since the rise of gardening, and especially since class society of agriculture and industry, the situation is different.

The fact that individuals think in terms of self, and think strategically, is not the same as full-blown short-sighted silly un-strategic selfishness. It is better to say we are self-interested than selfish. Yes, there is a difference. Self-interest leads us to see when our interest and the interests of other people coincide, and leads us to cooperate for mutual gain and protection. Self-interest leads people to trade labor for food, or apples for meat. Self-interest gets people to cooperate to keep the hyenas, lions, and bad neighbors out of camp. People who insist on always getting the upper hand and controlling every interaction, selfish people, do not have partners, and so do not fare well. People leave them alone in the wilderness to fend for themselves, and they die, their families die, and their genes die.

Even with as much as we know now about our evolutionary past and about life before horticulture, non-biologists still romanticize pre-modern and non-modern life as peaceful, cooperative, never competitive, full of sharing, never selfish, not self-interested noble, kind, spiritual, in tune with nature, never greedy, never taking more than is needed, and always playing out in a comprehensive happy ecological-social-

economic system. That is not true. I would guess that foragers were not that different from us now when we are not in harsh situations that promote conflict or tyranny. Don't romanticize or demonize.

### **Competition and Cooperation.**

The strongest driving force in natural selection is competition, especially between individuals of the same species, and this effect holds for humans. Wolf females compete to be dominant mother in a pack, and wolf males compete to be dominant father. Competition is between individuals. Competition focuses natural selection on individuals and competition gives natural selection much of its tone.

Our ancestors competed for food, water, shelter, mates, dominance, alliances, reputation, and leadership. People competed to show skill levels such as who could make the best spears or sing the best songs, and competed over good looks, forming cliques, greatest moral rectitude, religious knowledge, and ability to forge relations with spirits – much as we do. Besides direct competition, we competed indirectly by conniving, grudges, backbiting, gossip, lying, politics, framing, cheating with someone's spouse, cheating on my spouse, not helping, and excluding from groups. Natural selection and competition together left their marks as tendencies in our character. We often do our best when we compete and when we seek success and glory for ourselves and-or our team.

People also cooperated in finding food, in cooking food, sharing food, sharing tasks such as cleaning up, tending sick and injured people, doing tasks together that could not be done alone such as defending a large body of meat to be scavenged, finding allies, finding mates, protecting against predators, protecting against violence in the group, protecting against violence between groups, fighting people in the group, fighting other groups, participating in rites, rituals, ceremonies, and holy days, and encouraging morality. This cooperation too left its mark on our character. People are amazingly able to share and get together to do things. No other animal comes remotely close. Cooperation is what allowed us to conquer the world despite being puny humans. Cooperation depends on mutual self-interested benefit. Cooperation is a better way to compete.

Sadly, cooperation is plagued by cheating, lying, stealing, and slacking. If everyone else goes out looking for food, and shares what they bring back, why should you work? If other people will face off lions that come sniffing around camp, why should you be in the front? If your neighbor leaves dry meat hanging behind the hut while he-she goes off to arrowhead making class, who is to say the dog didn't take some? It is impossible to make sure everybody works hard every time at every task. Still, if people are to benefit from cooperation, people need ways to make sure others do almost their fair share of the work nearly all the time and other people can cheat only a bit.

So, not only do we need sanctions against cheaters, we also need to get other people to cooperate with us to sanction cheaters – we also need sanctions on people who merely tolerate. Not only do you have to (1) do your part, you have to do your part in (2) getting other people to act well, and you have to do your part in (3) getting other people to do their part in getting other people to act well.

Organisms, including people, compete directly and fairly for food and mates such as by getting to the food first, showing off, "showing skin", and fighting. Organisms and people also compete unfairly by hurting competitors. When a male lion takes over a pride, he kills off the young cubs already there, the children

of his predecessors. Male bower birds build big nests to attract females, often lined with shiny trinkets such as bottle tops and shells, and colored by fruit juices. Some male bower birds destroy the nests of other males, steal trinkets, and steal colored straw. At least one female chimpanzee, with her daughters, murdered the children of rival females. People mostly use the tools of social life to hurt competitors, such as slander, betrayal, spite, and backstabbing. Inflicting this kind of pain is most of the “action” in movies about mean girls. So, of course, humans also have to defend against spite. A lot of “keeping up with the Joneses”, being cool, hip, and up on trends in fashion, politics, art, religion, church, academia, and pop culture is about making sure others can’t slander us, our children, friends, and allies. Even more, humans imagine that others have committed unfairness against us so we have an excuse to commit against them. We also convince stooges that someone, actually our enemy, has wronged them so they will do the dirty work for us. That, too, takes up plot time in movies about mean girls. Some bugs and squishy animals have amazing ways to hurt rivals, too much to describe here, but, still, I would guess that humans have the greatest diversity of unfair competition. I am amazed at how people can think of all the scams that we see on TV news, and how writers can come up with devious ways for one character to hurt another or to get twisted revenge years after the initial badness. From now on, the words “cheating” and “lying” include unfair competition.

Unlike the modern state, foragers cannot appeal to a central authority, courts, and police to control liars, cheaters, thieves, slackers, and thugs. Foragers had to rely on local group dynamics. Scientists have developed a few ways to see how local people might solve problems for themselves. My favorite way is “game theory”. I cannot review methods. Because people do control cheating enough to cooperate, we did evolve some methods that did work in the past and still work now, even if not perfectly. Darwinists are not sure what methods worked in the past and what did not, what abilities we inherited, and how that still affects our thinking and doing today. Certainly we are sensitive to cheating. This issue figures large in theories about morality, to which I return later.

### **Mixed Human Nature and Societies.**

Because cheating, lying, stealing, and slacking worked in our past, they left in us a few genes for those behaviors. We all have a sleazy bad potential as well as a good potential. Thankfully, most of the time, for most people, good overcomes sleazy bad. But, for all of us, sometimes, the bad sleazy does win out. Who has not committed petty theft, slacked off, cheated, or lied? We tend to be opportunistic. We do it when we can get away with it, and we have a hard time not doing it when we can get away with it. We are susceptible to temptation. We have to keep this fact clearly in mind for state programs.

(0) To fully appreciate the following idea requires a technical background that I cannot give here but the idea is important so please accept it. In the complex human social situation, many strategies can work partially, at the same time, even mutually conflicting strategies. No one strategy is best always. Think of a strategy as a character type. No one type always succeeds and so always eliminates all other types. For example, sometimes it is better to cooperate and sometimes it is more successful to let other people do the work while you gain from their effort. Sometimes it is better to tell the truth while sometimes lying succeeds. Sometimes it is better to respect property and sometimes more gainful to steal – with quick fingers, a six gun, fountain pen, or computer.

(1) As a result, in any society, different people have somewhat different characters partly due to genes. Some people are more honest and some more prone to lying. Some are reliable in a fight while others tend to run. Some people love risk while others hate it. Society is a mix of types.

(2) Likewise, inside, ALL of us have blended characters. Except for a few sociopaths and psychopaths, ALL of us have a bit of the stand-up guy, liar, Boy Scout, Girl Scout, cheater, seducer, thief, embezzler, sneak, good girl, bad girl, risk taker, security seeker, etc..

(3) ALL of us are morally imperfect by evolved nature, and people have been imperfect through all of human history. NONE of us was ever perfect, not in all human history. There was no perfect original Adam and Eve. Most of "it" is in there in all of us, including good stuff and bad stuff.

(4) Which characters prevail in a society, and which character traits prevail in each of us, depends on a lot of factors. Literature, movies, and TV do a good job of explaining the factors. Good moral education and other education can help make people and society better if the education is realistic, and is realistic to the times and situations of real people.

(5) We cannot be made perfect, holy, totally compassionate, etc. We cannot love our neighbor as God loves us and as we love ourselves. We can have glimpses. Whether a few people can achieve some version of perfection does not matter because the vast majority of us cannot. In other places, I say "no harangue can make us perfect".

(6) Do not work for perfection, do not lament human imperfection, and do not lament that we cannot be perfect. Instead work to be better and more useful. Fight badness in yourself and in general. Religion can help, as can other kinds of education. Do what you can with what you've got.

(7) As far as I can tell, slightly imperfect people are more interesting, and often more useful, than perfect people; but that is no reason to wallow in, romanticize, or cultivate, faults and naughtiness. All people have enough faults so we can do pretty well with the faults that we already have. See comments on morality below.

(8) Because most of human nature already is "in there" in varying mixes in all of us, you can get more in touch with bad parts if you want. If you have never felt all the bad parts, or the depth of bad parts, then getting in touch with them can be a thrill. But that doesn't mean it is good in the long run to dwell in bad parts – even for you. Feel it, and get it over with. If you feel the need to dwell in the dark side, ask why, and what good it is. See chapter on Romanticism.

Use common sense about human character and avoid superficial stereotypes. Basically, all the common traits that you see, excluding mildly bizarre traits, have an evolved basis. People modify evolved potential through learning, especially social learning. Social learning does not end genetic influence. We can change our character through choice and education. We can get better. We can't be perfect.

Cooperation does not automatically end all individualistic competition. Likewise competition does not require only isolated individuals out against all other isolated individuals. People can cooperate to better succeed, as in cooperating to do tasks or in trading; and, in that case, cooperation is best seen as a way

to compete. A team consists of people who cooperate so as to better compete. People who cooperate with little obvious competition in one arena, such as gathering fruit and nuts, compete strongly in other arenas, such as for mates.

Contrary to myth, big nasty people, who are ready to beat the crap out of anybody, did not do well in our past, and our minds are not evolved to seek that tactic consistently. People like that did not have many friends, could not do well enough on their own, and mostly died out. Bitchy conniving manipulative backstabbing people also did not have friends and mostly died out.

With both sexes, likely the person who did best got along well, led by example, did not criticize harshly, and could form teams to do things. This person had good ideas, ideas that did not strongly favor him-her over others. This person brought out skill in others. Sometimes he-she inspired, as with Jesus, Gandhi, Churchill, and John Kennedy.

Once some good people get good things going, then bullies and connivers can take advantage, and so bullies and connivers never totally disappear. Force and conniving can have a role but are they only two abilities among many.

Sometimes in hard situations we need forceful people but not all the time. In the movie, "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance", what works is a mix of Jimmy Stewart (lawyer) and John Wayne (honest tough guy), and what doesn't work is Lee Marvin (sadistic bandit). Maybe Ben Cartwright from the TV series "Bonanza" is more accurate. We should ask why we now in the 2000s glamorize big nasty dominators, or bitchy connivers, rather than admire people who really were most useful in our past and still are most useful now.

Contrary to more myth, foragers did not often fight hand to hand, and the "winner" of conflicts was not the one who "had the strongest kung fu". That kind of fight did not happen even in the American West or old China. If two people had serious problems, they moved away from each other if they could. If two people knew a fight was coming, one ambushed the other in the back. This action is not honorable and romantic but it worked. It worked in the Wild West too but it was usually done with a rifle or shotgun and a shot to the back – not pistols at four paces. In old China, likely it was arrows in the back.

Contrary to yet more myth, girls, lasses, and women all compete, sometimes nastily. That is what "Mean Girls" and "Bring It On" are about. Also, boys, lads, and men all cooperate. That is what team sports are about. That is what military units and business units are about. What is typical of male cooperation and/or competition, typical of female, and common to both, is a big touchy subject, is plagued by myth and PC of Right and Left, and so I don't open it here. Even Darwinists get confused.

There is no consensus for how cooperative, competitive, honest, cheating, hard working, or lazy people are in general; of where the balance lies in general.

How much, how, and when people cooperate, compete, tell the truth, do as they say, and work hard, or instead people cheat, lie, steal, slack, etc., depends on culture and society, conditions such as availability of food and mates, and the history of cooperation and grudges. In a group with a good history, the good continues; in a group with a bad history, the bad continues. When food is gone, people eat neighbors, as

when Jerusalem was besieged. When America boomed in the 1950s and 1960s, we all loved each other. In modern states, usually the balance depends on institutions such as whether you live in a democracy or tyranny, have many political parties or a few or one, belong to a particular ethnic group or religious group, depends on ethnic and religious relations, whether you are an owner or worker, are in a labor union, your in-laws deal drugs and have police records, etc.

### **Limits of Human Foresight, the Greater Good, and Useful Institutions.**

People are self-interested. As hunter-gatherer-foragers, our social horizons originally ended about at our cousins, local group, speakers of our dialect, and respecters of similar spirits. Our ideas of common tasks were picking fruit and vegetables, a small cooperative hunt, gossip, and some shared moral fervor, some anger, some scheming, and some fear. The whole world was fifty miles (eighty kilometers) across. The world changed too fast to think in frames larger than a few weeks for “now”, and larger than a few years for an “average”. Modest cooperation usually coincided with self-interest but self-interest rarely led our ancestors to heroic self-denial for the greater good. We did not think grandly except in myth and religion. Anyone who thought grandly as a habit likely did not take care of business close to home and did not leave enough descendants. This is our nature, developed over millions of years, and a few thousand years of civilization and science have not changed it.

For these reasons, not because people are rabidly selfish, people now struggle to put the greater good above self-interest except in obvious cases. Even when we hear valid arguments about common good, and how a little sacrifice now can help all children later, we don't take the chance. We prefer to get ours soon in ways that we can see and feel. We see that; we just don't see anything bigger. This view is not irrational, stupid, selfish, nasty, demonic, fallen, or perverse. It made sense for hunter-gatherer-foragers. It made fairly good sense in gardening, herding, and agricultural societies. It worked in a lot of situations in industrial and capitalist societies. It does not work well in enough situations now and it is not enough now on which to build good societies.

We can make institutions to help us see farther, and to help cooperation while reducing competition and cheating; but we cannot make everyone Abe Lincoln or end competition and cheating. We do a lot better when we accept real human nature and we build on that rather than see humans as horribly depraved or see them as able to deal instantly with every issue of politics, economics, and ecology.

We don't want to end competition. Competition provides great benefits and competition helps people sort themselves out by ability, training, and character. We can channel competition to mostly good ends. We cannot force all competition into only good ends. Competition creates some badness in human character and human life but not all the badness, and likely only a small share of the badness. Most of the badness is there in itself because it succeeded in our past. Competition can create huge benefit.

Despite the great ability of people to cooperate, modern institutions that depend on good will and good social feelings rarely succeed well, and the oversight needed to make them succeed well is so expensive that it undermines the total of good that we get from the programs. Institutions that accept competition and self-interest, and harness competition and self-interest, do much better. Idealized socialism and communism don't work. Welfare for individuals can work but has to be managed, and it has to accept that people connive for self-interest regardless of society. Welfare for business firms does not work.

Fascism can work because it blends competition and cooperation but fascism hurts humans. Modern state programs for children can work because they are usually low cost for the benefit, and competition can be managed by adult supervisors. Sesame Street, Head Start, and breakfast and lunch at school are bargains. But even here, programs for children don't work if the programs ignore natural competition between children. Capitalism works well when it approaches the ideal: competition leads to lower prices and better goods, people earn according to ability and effort, no collusion between business firms, no one firm or group of firms dominates a market, there is enough so everyone can get by, world ecology is not in peril, the system does not cause increasing gaps in wealth and power, wealth is not a force in politics, and the whole is well regulated. If all these conditions hold, we can be quite lucky. If we can preserve them, we are wise.

Institutions that rely on intense competition and strong order can work during times of hardship but not for ordinary life, and they warp our nature too much. Sparta worked but it was a bad place for most people. Fascist capitalism and market-only capitalism can work but they distort humanity and society too much, and market-only capitalism is not really that but really fascism in disguise. Stalinism and Maoism were intensely competitive despite the ideology and so were bad on both sides of the coin – unreal ideals of cooperation with rigid state order and tacit intense competition.

Biologists tend to see cooperation as a roundabout way for individuals to compete. They see groups in terms of interacting competing individuals. Groups form and persist because they serve the self-interests of competing individuals. Individuals cooperate and they care for other individuals so as to serve their own self-interest. That does not mean there is no cooperation or caring, but cooperation and caring are not the primary reason for groups, and are not tied up intimately with the essence of group life. However much goodness arises, however we see goodness, depends on particular cases. Biologists usually don't judge goodness in non-human groups.

In contrast, anthropologists and sociologists too often see individualism and competition as unusual, even deviant and bad. From the 1960s through even now, anthropologists and sociologists saw competition as entirely due to a social complex based mostly around capitalism and the domination of White Men over all genders and ethnic groups. Caring cooperation is the typical human way in standard society. Living in a non-capitalist society automatically leads people to follow social rules and those social rules automatically promote coordination, cooperation, caring, and welfare. Anthropologists and sociologists see individuals in terms of a place, a role, in social wholes; they see individuals as made by social wholes. In contrast to human social life for most of human history, modern capitalist society is deviant and bad, and it makes all individual people deviant and bad.

I don't have to argue out this issue here but I do fall on the side of biologists.

### **Success is Comparative.**

Success is comparative. Competition is comparative. It is not a matter of how well we do by ourselves, it matters how well we do compared to others. If Betty always gets one rabbit a day but Sally gets two deer a week, then, in the long run, Sally does better than Betty. If Rose has 4 surviving children while Kate has only 2, then, over the long run, all the people will consist of Rose's descendants.

On the other hand, if Rose has 4 surviving children, the children could have more trouble finding food and mates, so have only 1 child each, and Rose will have only 4 grandchildren. With 2 survivors, all Kate's children all find food and mates, so have 2 or 3 children each, and Kate will have maybe 5 grandchildren. In the long run, Kate does better than Rose. It is better to do a little better than others but we have to be careful of ruining our own success.

As a result of comparative competition, we evolved to watch how other people do, and we evolved to compare us to them. We evolved to notice, seek, and imitate successful people. We "keep up with the Joneses". We evolved to imitate the trappings of successful people, so that if they use un-marbled flint to make tools, we use un-marbled flint. We evolved to look down on people who do less well than us and less well than the average, and to not do what they do. We evolved to make sure we are not associated with losers. We evolved to adopt or eschew clothing, trinkets, mannerisms, and other markers so we (think we) look like winners and we (think we) don't look like losers. We follow what others call winning and losing, rather than make our own standards. The comparative aspect of competition and success can put an edge on competition and interaction. Likely, comparative competition is the strongest weapon of the advertising industry. It can lead to fads such as fashion and to runaways over big houses, big cars, big boobs, big penises, and big business firms.

### **Means and Ends.**

Reproduction does not happen by itself. Successful reproduction needs food, warmth, clothing, housing, mates, sex, friends, partners, helpers, safety, and a good social life. Emotions and intellect both play their role in the right proportions that work. Art, including telling stories, sports, religion, morality, a good name, appealing looks, and achievement all can help get us a good social life, food, etc. They are means to greater reproductive (evolutionary) success. As such, natural selection would keep them around, and they are a part of us. We seek them. We are susceptible to them. Natural selection would keep them around to the right extent that they help us without hurting us. We seek the right amount of expression and we seek the right balance between all of our means.

We evolved to seek means to successful reproduction in themselves even when we do not see the link between them and reproduction. They take on a life in themselves. Ordinarily in our forager past, people kept them in perspective and did not get side-tracked into them too much for their own sake. Anger can be useful but not too much. Thinking out can be useful but not so much that we never act. In present life, we can get side-tracked into means-to-and-end and forget their role in contributing to successful family life. (In technical jargon, inclusive fitness (reproductive success) is the ultimate goal while the various means to inclusive fitness are "proximate mechanisms" or "proximate goals".)

In the modern world, wealth, power, fame, and glamour (beauty) still can lead to reproduction, and it is clear that people seek them. Regardless of reproduction, people often seek the goals for themselves. Yet in our forager past, people could not amass wealth or power. Few material goods lasted long. Power was getting other people voluntarily to go along with you; people did not order or dominate. Modesty was as important as fame. Beauty was short lived. Still, modern lusts for power, wealth, fame, and beauty are so strong that it is hard to believe they did not play a role in our evolutionary history. It is hard to believe lusts for power, wealth, fame, and beauty do not have a strong genetic basis. I think they do. Darwinists are working on the issue. Because the issue is not clear, I don't make more of it here. I do stress that

people lust for power, wealth, fame, and beauty in themselves regardless of reproduction and of effects on family life and community; and the lusts often lead us astray.

A good way to see the means that help reproductive success is through acts, attitudes, and ideas to which humans are commonly susceptible. What-we-are-prone-to likely worked in the past and likely left in us genes that make us prone to it. We are susceptible to fatty foods, sweet foods, burned meat, clean huts, good smells, handsome people, beautiful people, pulchritude, sex acts, promises, promises of sex, promises of support and fidelity, gossip, art, stories, religion, morality, conniving, coalition forming, coalition busting, power, fame, some wealth, lies, flattery, intimidating, getting intimidated, trains of valid logic, and trains of not-so-valid logic. We are tempted by all those. People can talk us into them. We can talk other people into them. If you don't like the term "susceptible" then you can use "enjoy" but the term "enjoy" doesn't get across what happens when we buy an unreal political promise because we want to support it for other reasons or take a drug because we want to be "out of it" for a good while.

### **Susceptibility and Control.**

Because we are susceptible to beauty, power, wealth, artistic ability, etc., people can use these things to control us to their advantage and we can use them to control other people to ours. We are susceptible to words, so people can successfully lie. We want sex, so other people can use offers of sex to control us. We want to be on the winning side, so people can use offers of "join us to tip the balance" to control us. We do the same to them. People evolved to use the susceptibility of others to their own advantage regardless of advantage of others, and often to the harm of others. People evolved to manipulate other people by using natural openings.

For most of the things to which we are susceptible, we also have resistance. The amount of resistance varies. We do not have much resistance to things that we would have met rarely in our forager past, yet had a high value, and, during our forager past, had little downside. We evolved to get as much of those as fast as we could, such as fatty foods, sweet foods, and sex. We resist things that had a big downside and that we met often enough, such as lies, sexual cheating, and power grabs.

We resist being controlled. We want to gain as much from being led as we would gain if we did nothing or did something else. Yet because the original thing has both value and dis-value, such as words and lies-as-the-misuse-of-words, we cannot get rid of susceptibility, using susceptibility, or resistance.

It is reasonable to ask "which side wins" but there is no constant answer. It depends on the people and the situation. In the modern world, fatty food, burned meat, and sweets win "hands down" over meager intellects and stern doctors. In lying, people that want to know the truth as it relates to them usually are a little ahead of liars, but not much. Human lie-detecting is a little ahead of human lying, but not much. As we see during every political election, liars still do well enough so we need not fear that lying will vanish from the human gene pool. People usually can tell, eventually, when a romantic partner is cheating but not always and not always fast enough to head off damage.

It is reasonable to ask whether, overall, people are more honest or more conniving. Do we tell the truth more often than we lie? Does our truth-telling overall cause more good than our lying causes harm? As far as I know, there is no measure. I guess that people are overall much better than worse, and do more

good than harm. Of course, if you have been the victim of harm, or have led a hard life, or you like all the fashionable “noir” in pop culture, then feel free to disagree.

### **Self-Deception.**

People that use the susceptibility of others to control them do not always know that they do so. We lie to ourselves too. When we pledge undying love, we think we actually mean it. When we fake interest in the work of a would-be paramour, we think we actually mean it. We talk ourselves into cake or chasing our neighbor as much as our gracious host talks us into eating cake or our neighbor lets us chase her-him. Because self-deception is so common in the game of susceptibility, using, and resisting, we cannot get rid of it either. We cannot be fully honest and open even to ourselves.

Keep in mind that the game is played over morality and religion. We evolved to yield to moral argument and religious visions. We evolved to produce moral argument and religious visions not only from direct experience of truth but also to control the ideas and acts of other people. We evolved to be skeptical of moral arguments and religious visions – from other people. We evolved to be very confident of our own moral argument and religious visions. I suspect we evolved to assert our moral and political opinions often, loudly, regardless of evidence, and regardless of much real logic. We evolved to spout. Often the producers of moral argument and religious ideas do not know themselves whether they produce visions and arguments out of belief in truth or out of compulsion to say something that people will listen to and act on. I think we more often want to assert ourselves than we witness for the truth. Out of this game, we have to find the most accurate and useful morality and religion.

The game of being susceptible, using susceptibility, resisting, and self-deception, was a strong force in the evolution of the multiple talents that we label by the one simple term “intelligence”.

Because of the role of this game, including self-deception, I return several times to the ideas, especially with religion, morality, and politics.

### **More on Limited Horizons; Us and Them.**

Natural selection is a short term process and it is focused on individuals and-or small groups. In our past, all the reproduction that mattered happened within three generations at most, usually one generation, and took place in our small group and its near neighbors. People did need a few other people to help find food, feel safe, and reproduce but didn't need a lot of others. Key players were self, spouse, immediate family, near family such as siblings and grandchildren, and close friends who helped us and to whom we gave help. Still now, people think in terms of me, my family, and near group. The typical time horizon is weeks. The typical distance is the neighborhood. People have trouble thinking of next year, the next decade, the next century, general humanity, economies, states, all the groups within states, ecosystems, and planets. We need good honest capable practical leadership to be able to think this way.

We tend to think: if it is going well now, it always will be like this, and we should exploit good conditions as hard as we can as fast as we can. We think: if it is going badly now, something is wrong in our group relations, with our leaders, or in our relations to the spirits; we have to act now to make it all better again. We have trouble assessing causes and their scope. We reject leaders that tell us what is true but that we

don't want to hear. We accept leaders who tell us what we want to hear even when it is false. Prosperity is always just around the corner. Again, we need good leaders and good ideas to get us over this constant yearning for silly pie in the sky. Because this kind of yearning is not realistic, it seems evolution would have selected it out of us long before now, yet it is still common. Many such unrealistic thought patterns remain in humans such as glamour. Among the remaining open questions in theories about the evolution of human character is the persistence of silly obviously impractical ideas.

People tend to think in terms of "us and them" on several levels as the situation warrants: individual me against other people; my family against other families including the families of my siblings; my extended family including the families of my siblings against the other families in the group; my group against other similar groups; and a few groups made up of related people and friends against other groups within which we have few kin or friends. Within "us" relations should be kindly, that is, people should act toward others as they act toward kin: "we are all family now". Toward "them" the quality of relations depends on what is at stake, what the risks are, the balance of power, any ties between groups such as marriages, and on the history of relations.

Now, people can extend "us and them" to cover relations between ethnic, religious, or political groups but usually in a selfish way rather than friendly way. Sometimes, people can extend "us versus them" to large blocs such as in elections.

In our past, people thought in terms of groups but likely not in terms of groups based on religion, ethnicity, and region. People lived on too small a scale for religion, ethnicity, and region to matter much. Modern people are able to extend group thinking in those ways. Yet people still tend to activate group thinking mostly in arenas of small groups of us against them or us with them, as when gay bashers go after one or two "queers", one clique goes after another as in academia or in the movie "Mean Girls", a few terrorists attack a school bus full of defenseless children, or our church gets together to help victims of a flood. The media have helped both kinds of extension.

(In my version of human evolution, which I do not stress here, differences in wealth, power, class, area, ethnicity, and religion came into play. Modern people put them into play now because, when we evolved, they were relevant, and we keep the ability to work with them. They are part of our character. I think fully modern humans evolved in a situation more like the tribes and chiefdoms of the Pacific Northwest Coast of the United States than like the foragers of the Kalahari.)

Competition, or lack of competition, between groups is not the only large force that determines if groups have good or bad relations but it is one of the biggest forces. It might be the force about which the state can do most by reducing it as much as possible.

If people think the pie is limited, and the pie is not enough, then people form groups to compete to make sure they get enough. If you can succeed only by being in a gang, even a gang as big as a whole race or religion, then you join a gang and you stay in. You also make sure all others are in a gang even if they don't want to be, so you know enemies and friends. Once groups form this way, it is hard to disband. The situation can be worse if people believe the piece is not enough not because it really isn't enough but because some people take a much larger share than they need or deserve, that is, when comparative competition is intense. We had enough group antagonism in our evolutionary past so that humans are

adept at this group thinking. This bad competition between groups happened with race relations in the United States since the middle 1970s.

In contrast, if people feel the pie is big enough, and will be shared roughly according to merit, so even if not everybody gets equally even the people who get little get enough so their children can get more, then people don't feel the need for a group and don't stress groups. Because competition is comparative, it can be hard to make sure the pie is big enough to make people relax, but it can be done. This condition prevailed in America in the 1950s and 1960s, and led to improvement in group relations and to advances in civil rights. States cannot make sure that all people and all groups get an equal share of the pie, and states cannot make sure sharing is fully fair. But states can make sure that everyone feels his-her efforts are rewarded and his-her efforts lead to enough gain so children can do better, and differences between groups don't accumulate and grow dangerous. States can assure an almost-fair playing field but states cannot assure an equal outcome. In our evolved past, definitely the outcome was not equal. The same comments apply to socio-economic classes as to ethnic groups and religious groups.

### **We are Not Smart Enough for Everything.**

People are amazingly smart, especially considering we formed our nature by chasing rabbits, picking apples, and wrangling among cousins. But we are not smart enough for everything now, not even for situations that we made. Many of us are not smart enough to find decent jobs in modern technological capitalism. Many of us are not educated enough. Many of us are not smart enough or educated enough to be adept citizens. Even if smart and educated, we have quirks that make us bad citizens: we do not seek evidence, do not know real capitalism with its real strengths and weaknesses, cannot judge when some power is really a threat, cannot stop thinking in terms of "us and them", don't know who our real "us" or "them" is, cannot see past the promises of demagogues, expect the state to make everybody better off than average even as we rail against the state, and expect the state to enact the morality of our group so we can feel justified, saved, and worthwhile. See Chapter Two. We did fairly well until after World War Two but have not done well since. Nobody knows how to overcome the limitations of our evolved minds to make us adept enough citizens.

If you think people are smart enough to deal well with the modern world, then why does advertising work so well despite being so obvious? Why are we so susceptible to fun crap? Why do pretty young people sell cars? Why do hipsters think they are different and better? Why do action movies and silly romances work so well although the characters, dialog, and scenes have not changed in decades? Movies are the same now as in 1935. Turn off the sound on the TV; then watch ads, a police show, medical show, and romantic comedy. See how silly and obvious they are. Then ask again why you are so susceptible. Do the same with political ads – they are scary. Even if most people are smart enough, such as, of course, you and your friends, enough people are not smart enough so that we all have a real problem.

In a democracy, not everybody has to be smart enough to figure out all the problems and their solutions. That is what leaders are for. The large majority of people have to be smart enough to choose leaders who understand true problems and offer realistic practical long-term solutions. This choosing leaders is what we have not been able to do. We are not that smart. Our inability to choose good adept leaders has been evident in the United States at least since Reagan. It won't get better. We won't get smarter. We can't make us any smarter than five million years of evolution already has.

Education could help but it hasn't helped enough, certainly not in proportion to how much we spend. Even if we spent more, it is not likely that education can make us smart enough in general to do the job. We have limits.

I had a hard time learning that people can make good decisions although they do silly things. People can make good decisions even when: they are not in my political party, put on makeup, worry about hemlines, wear shorts that show the bottom of their butts, spend money on hair, play fantasy sports, binge drink, brag, check email often, talk loud, think they are good athletes, think they are tough, smoke, listen to crap music that is really bad political sermons set to bad rhythm, obsess over business trends and conditions that they can't understand, spout PC bullshit rhetoric, send pictures of food on the Net, groom their lawns, stalk "the next big thing" in art, crusade, or are prejudiced by gender, race, nation, creed, or age. Even people with these behaviors can show insight.

But people can't make good decisions when all they do is the above, never learn facts, never learn how big important things such as capitalism really work, and never practice making good decisions. Activities such as listed above are important not because, by themselves, they disqualify a person as able to pick good leaders but because they show that a person has stopped thinking. Our evolved past made it far too easy to retreat into self-indulgent solace.

We tend to think that not being up to the job of citizen in a modern democracy somehow disqualifies us as people, makes us less men and less women. This view is not true. Even people who are not smart or not adept as citizens can be great as people. People can be amazingly brave and generous regardless of any ability for citizenship. The bravery and toughness of average people amazes me. If we required that all soldiers also had the obvious ability to serve with honor in the Senate, our country we would soon end. Not everybody can be John Kennedy, John McCain, or John Kerry. I find the courage of ordinary people far beyond me. I am stunned by people who were physically or mentally wounded and fought back. I know I am not up to their standard. I find people a great joy most of the time. It is not clear why we could have evolved the ability for greatness of humanity and soul during our past as hunter-gatherer-foragers; but we did. I am thankful we did. I would like to see people who use evolution to explain human character explain how our ancestors did that. It still does not automatically make us adept citizens.

### **Quick Summary in Transit.**

The common behaviors of people have an evolved basis, and they are learned. We have good instincts about how to deal with the mix of evolved basis and learning, and mostly we can go with our instincts.

We should accept human nature as it commonly is. On that base, we should build institutions within which people can learn to be better, in which good behavior reinforces good institutions. We should not try to force people to be better than they can be. We will see ordinary people sometimes to do great things in unusual conditions such as earthquake or disease. We cannot build a good state by expecting people to be great.

We also can expect people to be more than half-way decent most of the time. If people want to think of themselves as decent then they have to act decently, even, sometimes, in the face of other people who act badly. We evolved the ability to do this.

We can expect people not to be indecent and thuggish. We can expect people not to respond to a bad situation by crime, nastiness, acting like a thug, acting out, or terrorism. Especially in a plural democracy, we can and should expect people to respond to a bad situation through rational means. We can expect people to look at themselves to see how much they add to badness. We can expect people to look at their groups such as ethnic, religious, class, and gender groups, to see how much of the bad situation starts there. We can expect people to work to make their groups better. People evolved the ability to control their bad acts and to better their own group, and we can expect it of them. We can and should fault people when they act badly. We have to not enable bad acts. We don't have to tolerate thugs and terrorists even when they have a grievance. We can and should punish criminals and thugs. We evolved to do this too.

After some wildness in youth, most people want a good family life. That usually worked in our past, that is mostly what we evolved to do, and it usually works now. We can understand most of what people do if we think of their behavior as aimed at a good family life in the context of their economy, history, society, and culture.

People seeking a good family life can build a good state when conditions are not too odd. Sadly, modern life is too hard for ordinary people seeking a good family life to gracefully build a good state. Now we need something more. Chapters One and Two give a sense of what we need, and I go into the topic further elsewhere.

Many abilities and goals helped a good family life in the past: to make all kinds of art, to appreciate all kinds of art, work, finding the right mate, avoiding people who might not be right, cooperation, showing off, wealth, moderate power, friends, alliances, beauty, athletic prowess, shrewd thinking, rationality, religion, morality, etc. This is how most people succeeded in starting and raising families. People still seek these goals in themselves and as means to successful family life. In the first third of life, people often seek these goals largely for the goals themselves, such as wealth and fame. Still, in the last two thirds of life, most people learn to subordinate these goals to a successful family life and community life.

The modern version of these goals usually is getting an education, finding a mate, getting the best job you can that gives you some satisfaction and income with the least heartache, living in a safe clean neighborhood, and participating in community, religious, and political life. This package includes working for causes such as gay rights, national parks, or against abortion, if you believe so.

Evolution gave us the ability to enjoy many things that contributed to family life but now also have value in themselves. We should be free to seek these things as long as we don't hurt other people or hurt society as a whole too much. We should be able to have a few drinks, chase a few people of the gender that we prefer (if they allow), or ride a motorcycle.

Some people now get caught up in what used to be means-to-an-end in our past, such as wealth and power. These people are not necessarily bad although we might see some as sad. We need to insure they do more good than bad in their striving. Too often they do more bad than good.

Some people should not primarily seek family life but should work for art, science, politics, commerce, or religion. A few great musical composers, such as Beethoven, or philosophers, such as Plato, Thomas Aquinas, Hume, and Kant, did not have good family lives but still did much good. Jesus thought following God and following him were far more important than family life, wealth, or power. The Buddha thought that thinking clearly and assessing life correctly were more important than family life, wealth, or power. Here I do not explain where these people come from and their relation to human evolutionary history and our genetic base.

There are basic differences between men and women, differences rooted in our genes and evolutionary history. The differences are not nearly as important as we make them. Men and women overlap in all the key traits that make us human. The overlap is much bigger and more important than any difference. Still, the difference can be crucial and it is a big part of what makes life fun. Although there are two biological sexes, there are more than two genders, and at least some of the more-than-two have genetic bases. Homosexuality (gayness) likely has a firm genetic component. The same person can feel and act like more than one gender although not usually at the same time. Even gay activists often are confused about the variety of genders. The various genders can have a lot of fun discussing this topic. I don't go into gender any more here.

I overlook the roles of learning, culture, society, history, economy, ecology, material conditions, etc.

### **Morality.**

I don't explain what morality is. Use your evolved moral intuition. See Parts 8, 9, and 10 below.

For Darwinism, morality is a puzzle. On the one hand, morality is an ideal. Morality tells us to be as good to others as to ourselves, to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. But loving your neighbor as yourself can thwart self-interested reproductive success and thwart potentially self-beneficial competition. Yet morality evolved from the self-interest of individual people interacting. How can "rise above self-interest" evolve from "follow only self-interest"? Sometimes people live up to the ideal, even against self-interest, as when people help children that they don't know out of a crashed bus. Most of the time, the ideal and practicality go along pretty well. People don't steal from the police station. We give to our neighbors who are likely to give to us. Still, nobody lives up to the ideal fully. All of us fall far short every day. Usually when evolved ideal and basic self-interest conflict, in a big enduring arena, then self-interest wins.

How we meet the ideal or fail to meet it shows a pattern, the pattern makes sense in light of the fact that we evolved, and the pattern doesn't make much sense any other way. (I skip cultural rules and social organization, which overlooking doesn't undermine what I say here.)

A simple observation about the pattern of following the ideal and failing it gives us some hints. The way in which we follow or fail goes along well with common sense practicality. The pattern goes along with what succeeded in our past and what usually succeeds now. Take "kind" to mean "morally good to" and

“nasty” to mean “morally bad to”. We are kind to our kin. We are kinder to near kin than far kin. We are kinder to people who live with us, such as in our house, than to people who live farther away. We are kinder to people who live around us, as in our neighborhood, than to people who live far away. We can be kind to strangers but we don't feel too bad if we are not. We can be nasty to people who have been nasty to us. We are nastier to people in another school than to people in our school, and likewise with neighborhood, church, and city. We are nastier to foreigners and people in other countries than people in our own country. We are nasty to people who we know have done bad things such as molest children or defraud the teachers' pension fund. We shoot burglars.

Biologists explain the pattern in this way:

-We are nicer to people who are likely to be nice back to us.

-We are nicer to people according to their degree of kinship with us, mixed with the kind of relation we have with those particular kin.

-We sometimes take advantage of people that we don't expect to have relations with, when we can get away with taking advantage.

-We are nasty to rivals that we know about.

-Briefly, we are kind to people that benefit our reproductive success. We are nasty to people that harm our reproductive success if we can get away with it.

-Sometimes we make mistakes as when modern urban dwellers help a stranger even though the stranger is never likely to help the reproductive success of the urban dweller. Once evolution sets into motion a strong emotion such as the feeling of “us and them”, sometimes the emotion makes a mistake just as sometimes we eat a fruit that looks ripe and sweet but is really sour.

-Usually we do better when we cooperate than not. Cooperation requires some risk, in particular risk of cheating. We have to be able to overcome the risk to gain the benefits of cooperation.

-Even though we can see the benefits of cooperation, see that that the benefits overcome the risks in the long run, see the risk of cheating, and see that we could benefit in the long run if we could suppress cheating, this practical assessment is not enough to overcome the risks and get us to cooperate enough. We need something emotional as well.

-Morality allows us to gain the benefits of cooperation, to overcome the risk, and to suppress the risk of cheating. People who are moral to each other cooperate better among each other than people who are not moral. Moral provides the emotion needed to cooperate and benefit.

-Morality is an indirect means to gain the benefits of cooperation, both directly by getting moral people to cooperate with each other, and indirectly by getting moral people to punish and eliminate cheaters and slackers.

-Feelings of morality likely developed as extensions of feelings that we have toward kin, trading partners, work partners, and neighbors. We originally had the feelings for other reasons that make sense in terms of natural selection (I don't explain more here) but are easily turned into morality and incorporated as part of morality.

-Once feelings of morality arose and spread among a group, and people who felt morality were good to each other and bad to cheaters, then natural selection would sustain morality well enough.

-What matters is that overall moral thinking and moral acting, both kind and nasty, help our reproductive success, that is, that morality serves practicality.

I take this account to be very largely true. No other account is nearly this true. What follows is comments on this sketch. Part 8 below explains in more detail.

Not all people are smart enough to figure out all the provisions in a modern mortgage but people are not all stupid. People can figure out practical needs and what serves practicality. If morality largely serves practicality, and we can figure out practicality anyway, isn't morality redundant? Why do we need an extra level of force, morality, to tell us to do, or not do, what we can figure out anyway? As of 2016, there was no definite answer. All I say is that morality did succeed as an extra level of force in our past, and so natural selection kept it.

First, we benefit from people with whom we have consistent exchange relations, especially trading of help in work, food, child care, and marriage. They also gain from us. As part of this mutual gain, while the relation persists and does well, we have good feelings for each other. However, if the relation goes bad, we also have bad feelings toward each other, as in a divorce or when roommates start feuding. Second, kin also help each others' reproductive success not only in the same way as do other exchange partners but just by being kin and by doing a few special things that only kin do. I do not here explain how kin help each other's success just by being kin. See Part 3. Kin also have good feelings most of the time but the feelings can turn rancid.

Morality needs feelings for its force. The feelings that power morality likely originated as modifications of the feelings that we have for partners and kin. Once the feelings were used in the moral arena, they took on a life of their own, and morality took on a life of its own. At that point, morality worked overall to help reproductive success, so natural selection kept morality. We are the descendants of people who had moral feelings and did well.

(I think the feelings that power morality have to follow the logic of the Golden Rule and "applies equally". We have to think that morality is fair. Mainstream Darwinism differs from me in this regard. Mainstream theory does not think the feelings have to follow any particular logic, they only have to serve reproductive success. Natural selection can attach moral feelings to any act that benefits reproductive success such as helping a work buddy and can insure moral feelings do not attach to an act that might hinder success such as helping a suspicious stranger. See Parts 9 and 10.)

The acts that come out of mutual benefit and kinship are fairly strong, and people figure practicality pretty well. Again, if so, why was the extra emotion of morality needed? First, sometimes the feelings we have

for kin are not enough to hold us in the big groups that we need for big projects such as hunting a bear or a herd of deer, or protecting the whole local group. Second, likely nothing else solves inevitable problems of cheating, especially when cheating often makes self-interested sense in the short term. Cheating is a strong acid that dissolves good relations, as most of us find out some time in our lives. Simply seeing the benefit of a mutually helpful relation, and-or simply being kin, are not enough to stop cheating so we can cooperate. We need something emotional and strong. Morality can work. It can suppress cheating, and cheaters, enough to keep the benefits of cooperation, mutual help, and kinship.

Another way to say this is that morality is the strongest, and the one absolutely necessary, “social glue” of human social life. Without morality, we could not have cooperated enough to evolve into humans. This is why I like to see evolved human nature through the lens of morality.

Once humans evolved moral feelings and moral acts, natural selection made sure they did apply where they usually serve practicality and did not apply where they harm practicality, as much as possible, even if the fit is not perfect. In our past, natural selection successfully made sure that the fit was good enough so the benefit of morality always was greater than the cost.

Morality requires not only good relations with friends and group mates but also requires that moral people (a) punish bad people, (b) urge other moral people to punish bad people, and (c) stigmatize or punish the otherwise moral people who do not help enough to punish bad people. Morality requires that sometimes we are moralistic and nasty. Sometimes we have to treat usually good people as if they were bad. This issue of punishment and being moralistic is troublesome, so I leave it at this for here.

Morality is not fully rational. Morality is a mix of judgment and irrational emotions. Even so, it works.

We need the ideal of morality to have the strong feelings that get us to work together, to stop cheating in ourselves, and to punish cheating in others. But, if we really followed the ideal, then ideal morality would undermine itself. Cheaters would be able to take advantage of all the blindly moral people, all the stupid suckers. Morality would self-destruct. Paradoxically, to work, morality both has to be an ideal and has to be somewhat selective. We have to think of being good to everybody but really we have to be good to others who are reliably good to us, and we have to be bad toward others who are bad to us, especially others who are consistently bad.

Because our moral nature evolved, despite the ideal of morality, we do not feel morally equally toward all people and we do not act morally equally toward all people. We know the ideal but we do not follow the ideal, and we cannot follow the ideal. We are susceptible to morality as we are susceptible to sweets, fat, burned meat, power, good dwellings, handsomeness, beauty, pulchritude, sex, ceremonies, religion, and temptations to lie, steal, and cheat. We have to find the ideal through the susceptibility.

Because our moral nature evolved, moral harangues don't work. We can't make people generally better, and better citizens, by carping, ideology, dogma, threats, promises of heaven, fear, or promises of being great contributors to some great cause. Harangues don't work even if they come from parents, teachers, priests, politicians, demagogues, or politically correct people. Moral instruction can work a little, but it is not like a harangue, and I don't go into the difference here. Men do not treat women well or ill depending mostly on moral climate but do so depending on conditions of home life, work, work life, and politics. The

same is true of relations between ethnic and religious groups. If times get tough, usually we can't badger ourselves so as to stop people in other ethnic or religious groups badly. No matter how much I point out to people that seeing problems clearly, and thinking them out to a realistic practical solution, is the moral duty of a good citizen, my admonition almost never works. People learn their morality more from art such as TV and from looking around to see what other people are doing and what works. Likely that is how our forager ancestors learned their morality too, how they learned who was "us" and who "them", and how to treat us and them. "Do as I say, not as I do" never works. Saint Francis of Assisi insisted that we preach constantly and that sometimes we even use words when we preach.

What does work is: good institutions; the fact that important people are realistic, recognize how society and socio-economic classes really work, recognize real problems, work on realistic practical solutions, can explain what is going on, and can explain what to do about it. When that happens, then morality, religion, and practical life can go together well. Then, people can relax enough to get more religious and moral in ways that are more in line with what the great religious leaders wanted. The world has had very little practical realism since World War Two, not even in America, not even with your favorite leaders such as Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama.

People range from evil, bad, immoral, naughty, amoral, neutral, modestly moral, fairly good, strongly good, naturally genuinely good, naturally genuinely sweet, moralistic, annoyingly moralistic, zealous, to crazy zealous. People can be concerned more with positive kindly helping morality or with condemning morality. All people are a mix, in different ways, in different situations. There is no sure-fire formula to say where the balance lies; it varies with individuals, and with societies, cultures, conditions, and history. We can make people better, and make them somewhat into the people that we want, through training and institutions. Bad situations stay bad, good situations need constant care.

I said that modestly flawed people are more interesting than "goody two shoes" people. Slightly naughty people can be interesting, and we are more relaxed around slightly flawed people than around moralistic people. We get more done working with slightly flawed people. We trust them more. People who are annoyingly moralistic and zealous usually are not actually more moral. As books, stories, TV shows, and movies have said, often they are hypocrites who just use morality to manipulate even if they themselves don't know what they do. Moralistic conniving worked in our evolved past so we all have some evolved basis for it and some of us have a strong tendency for it. On the other hand, conniving happened often enough in our past so people also developed a kind of "radar" or "immunity" to it, as with cheating and lying. Beware the people who seem too good and who call to arms too often. That is one reason why we are more comfortable with slightly flawed people and why they get more done.

We should not make the modern mistake of thinking that people are better because they are worse. Bad people are still bad. We should not indulge our moral flaws or cultivate moral flaws because we feel that makes us morally superior or existentially superior. Everybody has enough moral flaws so nobody needs to cultivate any more flaws. Go with what you've got already; it is enough. Beware of people who have cultivated a morally flawed bad boy bad girl persona just as much as you beware of moralistic hypocrites. Often bad boys and bad girls are bores, boors, and hurtful.

Sometimes the carping moralists are correct, and even the thundering zealots are correct. We do need to learn to recycle. We should not dump motor oil down the drain. We do need to use re-usable bottles and

cans. We should give to charity. We should not support demagogues. “No” means “no”. The character Gandalf in “Lord of the Rings” was modeled after Clive Staples (C.S.) Lewis, a call-to-arms zealot who was far more right than wrong. Even those damn PC people of Left and Right are right a lot of the time in what they say if not in what they do. You have to grow your own good judgment.

Don't be afraid to go a little overboard sometimes in sweet simple goodness or in zeal. A little craziness sometimes is good for us and the people around us.

### **Religion.**

Some of what is true of morality is also true of religion. Religion seems little relevant to practical issues, was not much more relevant in the past, people can figure practicality adeptly without need for religious guidance, sometimes religion gets in the way of practicality, so people often ignore it, and people mold religion to serve practical ends. So why confuse ourselves with added questions about what spirits, gods, saints, Jesus, God, the Buddha, or the Dharma might want? Why is there religion? I go into this topic in later optional parts of this chapter, and it is not useful to go into it much here. Briefly, religion is social glue, it works with morality so they reinforce each other, it lets us know who is in our group and who not, It lets us know who we can trust and not, how much, and in what ways. Also, religious thinking is inevitable in an evolved being with a lively mind such as ours and which uses categories to think as we do.

Without thinking of why religion might have evolved in the first place, and what religion might be in itself, instead think of how religion and practical life shape each other, and how they get along. I think practical life influences religion as much as religion shapes practical life, at least after practical conditions get going and get the upper hand. Religion reflects a way of life, and way of life how people make a living. Once capitalism becomes the dominant economic system of the world, middle class people who began as Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Jews, or Muslims will act more like each other, and, in truth, have religious beliefs more like each other, than their distinct religious origins now lead us to expect. Hunger-gatherers who insisted staunchly on worshipping spirits of the wet cool jungle and the river after their band moved to the dry hot savannah and had to depend on water holes, did not do as well as fellows who discovered a new world of spirits who took care of water holes, rain, and hot weather. We inherited a similar ability to shape our religious beliefs to validate our way of life now and to validate what we want for success in our way of life such as finding a big stand of nut trees or finding a good job.

Religion does make a difference. Democracy and good capitalism did develop among Western Christian countries and did not develop among Hindus or Buddhists. It is not clear to me exactly how this power of religion to make a difference is rooted in our forager way of life, and how this power stems from abilities that developed while we were foragers. So I leave the issue mostly alone.

A few other religious features have roots in our evolved nature but the link is not clear now. Although I have ideas, it is not worth reviewing them here. It is worth mentioning the features.

(1) People want to feel their lives mean something, count for something. People wish they could do amazing things and be amazing people like Newton or Gandhi, and so make their lives count. That hope is not realistic for most of us. Instead, we want our daily lives, personal, family, community, career, and

business lives to mean something, to count. If our own lives are not so successful through our own direct reproduction, we want to feel that our contribution to our kin, friends, and neighbors counts.

(2) People feel something “bigger than me”. I think this is God. Other people use other names and other people have a different sense of the bigger. We want to connect to the bigger than me. We want to feel that the bigger than me approves of us and helps us.

(3) People want their ordinary lives to connect to the bigger than me. People want the bigger than me to approve of their ordinary lives. People want the bigger than me to make their lives meaningful, to make their lives count.

(4) People did not start out with an idea of a single ethical God. People started with many spirits, usually good, but not all entirely good. These spirits are part of the bigger than me, or, collectively, they make up all of the bigger than me.

(5) People feel that, if they have good relations with the spirits, then things will turn out well. The crops will grow. Food will be abundant. Nobody will get hurt. Families will do well. Lives will feel meaningful. On the other hand, if things go badly, then relations with the spirits must be bad. We need to make amends, however it is the spirits have suggested for doing so.

(6) Perhaps before, but especially after people began to do agriculture and to live in state societies, and continuing into industrial and post-industrial societies, people had leaders who would make good relations with the spirits. If things were bad, people expected their leaders to do something to improve relations with the spirits, and to make things good again. If things don't get better, or if a disaster strikes, even a disaster over which modern scientists would not expect leaders to have any control, still the people blame the leaders.

(7) Perhaps before, but especially after people began to do agriculture and to live in state societies, and continuing into industrial and post-industrial societies, people want a hero (“hero” includes women). The hero has tasks-roles: (A) Mediates between the people and the spirits. (B) Makes all big things alright. “Things” includes food, shelter, safety, security, wealth, and control of natural disasters such as floods. The state makes sure that our state prevails in conflict with other states. (C) The hero makes people feel that their lives are meaningful and count.

(8) People want a mediator between the spirits and themselves. They want somebody who can talk to the spirits for them. They expect the spirits to send such a hero. Moses, David, Jesus, Mohammad, and the Buddha are examples of the hero.

(9) Perhaps before, but especially after people began to do agriculture and to live in state societies, and continuing into industrial and post-industrial societies, people seek cosmic principles, and they seek to identify persons with cosmic principles. People don't want only good and bad, people want goodness and evil, and they want particular supernatural persons to embody goodness and evil. People want not only to see the Spring come every year, they want a principle of Regeneration, and they want to see a person embody Regeneration. In common form, this tendency is simply personification of natural forces and-or common events such as lightning or war. I wish to get across the people seek something deeper, more

pervasive, and important. People see maleness and femaleness but they also want GENDER to be a cosmic principle and want embodiments. People want WISDOM to be a cosmic principle and they want a goddess of Wisdom to embody Wisdom. People want Dharma to be a principle and they want avatars to embody not only specific instances of Dharma coming to straighten out the world but they also want avatars of the general depth and pervasiveness of Dharma. Even academics treat their favorite theories as cosmic principles and treat their heroes as embodiments of Science, Rationality, Progress, or Art. Even Darwinists and anthropologists do this.

(9) I don't know exactly why people seek cosmic principles like this and why they want super persons to embody them. I can speculate but it would do little good here.

(9 continued) Perhaps not most early Christians, but certainly orthodox Christians after the Gospel of John, made Jesus into the embodiment of several cosmic principles. That was a serious bad service to Jesus and his followers even if Jesus is the personification of cosmic principles.

(10) People are superstitious and only about half-rational. People believe in super natural force. People believe the spirits reward morality and punish immorality. People believe that spirits reward people for following orders (laws) and punish people for breaking orders. People need the supernatural, and usually need spirits, saints, mediators, wizards of all genders, spirit doctors, rites, ceremonies, civil ceremonies that are like religious ceremonies, festivals, etc. People believe in luck and fate at the same time. People need to believe that spirits watch over them. People need to believe there is a close connection between the state, family life, and the supernatural.

(10 continued) All this superstition need not be harmful and need not lead all people into stupidity. We need to recognize what is bad now, attack that, and leave harmless stuff alone. Most superstition does little harm and a lot of it does some good by bringing people together. A lot of it is fun.

(10 continued) We cannot make people fully rational, rational enough, or even much more rational, with harangue, threats, or shame. Trying to do so is like American Prohibition against alcohol or the War on Drugs.

(10 continued) We have to think seriously how rational people have to be, and in what ways, for particular kinds of government to succeed, especially for self-governing democracy. We have to think whether we can make enough people rational enough. If we think we can make enough people rational enough, we have to think how. I don't think our modern populist style of democracy has faced this issue at all.

(10 continued) It is up to particular individual people who think they are sufficiently smart, rational, human, well rounded, and irrational, to sort out what is good and bad in rationality and irrationality, sort out what is likely to be true (such as God) from what is likely to be false (animal spirit companions) and harmful (fear of witches), and to teach other smart receptive people. This sorting and teaching does not necessarily involve diatribes against the masses and their bad ignorant superstition. We have not done a good job of sorting and teaching lately.

The fact that religion and practicality often meld makes it easy for me to give advice. I repeat what I said in Chapters One and Two. The best ideals for modern states come from the teachings of Jesus, mixed

with Western ideas of the individual and state, and mixed with practicality. Every religion can adopt them fairly easily. All people can learn them. All religions can adopt them with little damage to the historically key ideas of the religion. We can shape institutions to go with them. We can do all this without offending any major religion. If these ideals are not acceptable to any religious group, then too bad for them, and that group has to change or has to live apart from nearly all the modern world.

If you want to see how evolution prepared us to be nice, think of good relations in a large extended family or in a small group such as the supporters of Little League. From the old TV show “The Waltons”, think of the family and its neighbors. To see nasty, think of bad relations in the same arena, in the family and with neighbors – even around Walton Mountain. Think of modern TV shows about set-upon wronged women and cycles of revenge. Thinking of how a church, neighborhood, or academic department can go good or go bad is a useful exercise. We are like that because we evolved to be like that, good and bad.

### **Natural People Again.**

(1) Morality is an ideal. As an ideal, morality tells us to care for other people as much as we care for ourselves. Yet morality evolved out of self-interest. How can an ideal that tells us to transcend self-interest arise out of self-interest?

(2) Morality is a combination of both irrational emotion and considered rational judgment.

(3) Morality largely serves practical self-interest. It helps people do practical things that they could not achieve without morality. People are adept judges of practicality most of the time. So why do people need irrational emotional morality to get them to do what is in their own practical self-interest? Why can't people reap the benefits of practicality, especially of cooperation, without irrational emotional morality to push them and bind them?

(4) Ordinarily we think that rational strategic consideration best serves practical self-interest. Yet people cannot achieve full practical self-interest without irrational emotional morality. People need irrationality to achieve supposedly rational practicality.

(5) Morality works as an ideal only because it doesn't work as an ideal. If people were fully moral, then their moral society would fall apart, for many reasons. People need apply morality selectively to keep the ideal of at least some morality. People need to be good to some people, indifferent to others, and bad to yet others, so people can keep the ideal of morality and be good to the select few.

(6) Imperfect people are often more interesting than really goody people.

(7) Nobody can be morally perfect.

(8) Somewhat paradoxically, we are often better people when we are less morally perfect, or at least when we try less hard. We often do more overall good even if we do a little damage along the way. Society often achieves more benefit when people are not as concerned with goodness.

(9) We get nervous around strongly moralistic people. We appreciate a little urging but don't like being told we are piles of shit (Martin Luther), and we will go to hell if we don't straighten up right now and do what a zealous moralist tells us. While morality is an ideal, it seems to work best when it is not extreme. Can an ideal be an ideal but not be absolute?

(10) The West has opposed emotion to reason since at least Plato, 2400 years ago. The Hebrews had their version of this dichotomy and preference in "personal indulgence versus God-given Law". The two versions fused after Jesus and the early Church Fathers. Previously, the West extolled reason above emotion. Since 1800, the West, and, now perhaps most of the world thanks to Western pop culture and Romanticism, extols emotion above reason. Which view does morality support?

It is easy to have a metaphysical "field day" with some of these points but I urge you not to. Figure out what might have happened in our evolutionary past and what is going on now with morality. See why it is a good idea to keep the ideal of morality and to live up to it as much as you can. I take up a few of these points later in optional Part 8.

One point I wish to linger on here because of its role in Western pop culture since about 1800, the idea that emotions are better and more reliable than reason, except the emotion of morality. Maybe the most obvious version of this theme is "All You Need is Love" but the idea is more general. It is the idea behind "I never felt so alive". It is the idea of "taking a leap". I have nothing against good emotion, in fact, I like it. But that is not what this theme leads to. It leads to indulgence, confusion, crime, and mistakes such as discussed in the Chapter on Romanticism.

Because morality needs strong emotion, a Martian might think people would indulge morality as a way to find cosmic satisfaction, to feel really alive, and to "Say Yes to Life". In fact, in the ideology of "feelings are better" and "trust your feelings", bad mere morality usually is put alongside bad mere reason. Morality is not put along with bad reason because morality has a rational component but is put with bad reason for other motives that are too much to go into here.

Be aware what you do when you extol emotion above mere reason yet also look down on mere morality. This is a bad move. Figure out why you do it, and stop. Instead, figure what is good and bad, practical and impractical, realistic and unrealistic. Then dare to be as morally good as you can.

### **Emotions, Reason, and Biological Explanation.**

Please see Part 3.

### **PART 3: Optional: Aspects of Evolved Human Nature.**

This part gives more background so non-specialists can read popular books on the evolution of morality and the evolution of religion, and so non-specialists can follow the comments on the evolution of morality and evolution of religion given below. I repeat a little from above.

### **Groups Again.**

Remember that we evolved as hunter-gatherer-foragers. Social life came in several levels:

(A) Bands composed of several small extended families, with maybe 10 people per extended family, about 20 to 70 total people in a local band. Our ancestors carried out their daily lives in this setting.

(B) Groups of about 150 people, composed of several nearby bands, with whom members of local bands consistently interacted (“Dunbar’s number”).

(C) Clusters of about 500 people (up to 1500), composed of many bands and-or several groups of (B). As members in (C), people in (A) and (B) met irregularly but likely spoke the same language, shared religious ideas, and considered all the people at their level (C) as “us”.

(D) Larger groups about which little is known, and which could be “us” or “them” depending on situation.

(E) People who were seen, or who left tracks, but were not known very well and with whom we did not interact much. These people would be considered dangerous, and we would be nervous around them. The line between (D) and (E) is not distinct. In fact, the lines between (C), (D), and (E) might not be very distinct.

(F) Rivals could arise at any level but were more likely at medium levels such as the good hunter, “pretty youth”, or great singer who lives a group or two over - not unlike, now, the athlete, good looking person, or hot-kid-in-a-band in some high school across the city or county.

Families moved between bands (A) and groups (B) according to needs and whims, in fair safety. Likely, the lower the level, the more important it was in evolution and shaping our nature. All levels could have played some role in our evolution but that topic leads to a controversy into which I don’t go.

The small extended family of our past was NOT the idealized extended family of the Bible, some religious ideals, or TV shows. It was made of a woman and her current spouse, surviving children, and sometimes surviving grandparents, usually parents of the woman. A woman had about five children over her lifetime, of which two survived to make their own families. When children got old enough to have a spouse, they did not have to live in the same camp as parents, and often for a while did not. Likely, girls came back to mother for help in birthing. It is not clear how many spouses a person might have over a lifetime, due to death of a spouse or separation of spouses, but, judging from current foragers, likely at least two, maybe four. People were “moderate serial monogamists with mild polygyny”. Families were more like what now we call “blended”. This is what our minds are set for. This is not always what succeeds best in modern economic life or what makes the best environment for children in modern life.

### **Kin Selection and Inclusive Fitness.**

Successful reproduction includes not only your own children but also reproduction through kin, such as nieces, nephews, grandchildren, and cousins. What you do for them affects your success, what they do for you affects your success, and vice versa. We have to take kin into account to count success. If we help our brother, nieces, and nephews to succeed, such as by sharing food with them when we make a large kill or find a big apple tree, that success counts almost as much – but not quite – as helping our

own children. Likewise, if we hurt nieces and nephews when we do not share or when we punish a group as a whole for moral badness, hurting them hurts us too. The fact that relations between kin can affect reproduction is called “kin selection” or “inclusive fitness”.

### **Reciprocity.**

Animals can help each other. Sometimes animals of the same species help each other, and, when they do, often they are kin, as when sister monkeys groom each other to clean each other and feel better. Yet animals help even when they are not related and even when they are not of the same species as when mongooses and birds both watch for predators and both heed each other’s warnings. This action is called “mutualism”, “reciprocal altruism”, and “reciprocity” depending on details that are not useful here. It is “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours”. Reciprocating is risky and can be plagued by cheating but it does work often enough. In social animals such as monkeys and wolves, it is hard to separate effects of reciprocity, kin selection, and individual selection.

### **We are Them and They are Us.**

In small bands of people, everybody knew his-her children might marry the children of anybody else in the group. We succeed only through other people. If we treated other people well or badly, indirectly we treated our children and ourselves well or badly. When we helped other people, as by sharing food and tasks, chances were they would help us later, so, indirectly we helped ourselves when we helped others. When we treated other people as we wished to be treated, indirectly we did treat ourselves as we wished to be treated. Along with kin selection, this effect is one of the roots of empathy and sympathy. It is part of inclusive fitness.

Of course, our children are not exactly ourselves, other people are not exactly like us, other children are not exactly like our children, many other people are not our kin, and exchanging with other people is not quite the same as making do for ourselves. So, people did not act fully in accord with idealized empathy and the Golden Rule.

Social animals, including people, live in groups for many reasons: safety from predators, safety from others of the same kind (as when tom cats kill kittens), to accomplish large tasks that cannot be done by one person such as kill buffalo, find food, defend food, share food, share tasks, share childcare, find mates, and help heal. Social animals usually depend on their groups. Even so, it is still better to look at groups in terms of individuals than to think of individuals in terms of the group.

As part of group life, we have a sense of “us” and “them”. “Us” and “them” is not absolute but varies with circumstances and needs. “Us and them” is not always evident in obvious social units. It is built through interaction. We have “our” family versus other families. We also have “we boys” which can cut across families and might override family feelings. We have “our band” and “we who speak the same language and think of similar gods” in contrast to “other bands”. We have “us who want to live near this water hole” and the “them who can use the water hole anytime they want but don’t really live here”.

### **Thinking in Categories.**

Normal people have natural categories that they use to order the world. It is easier to deal with the world if we come predisposed to think things in the world come in natural types, for example: dead stuff that usually doesn't move, such as dirt; hard dead stuff such as rocks; moveable dead stuff such as water, air, and clouds; plants; animals that move but don't have much of a personality or will, such as slugs; animals that have some will (intentions) but aren't very smart, such as toads; animals that have a will (intentions), recognize natural categories, and can vary their response according to the situation and their past experience, such as deer; animals that recognize the intentions and personalities of other animals, such as dogs and monkeys; humans; us and them; and things in the world that don't have a material basis but can influence us, such as wind and the spirits.

Although we come with a few built-in natural categories, most of our ideas about the world, most of our categories, we learn. After we are more than about four years old, our natural categories do continue to operate in the background but we live mostly in a world that we learned and that is built up from made-up learned categories. We always have the category "physical thing" but that is less important than specific ideas of "car", "house", "smart phone", and "TV set". We always have the category "place" but it is less important than "home", "school", "mall", "bar", "restaurant", and "downtown". We always have the idea of "person" but that is less important than "mom", "dad", "sibling", "teacher", "girlfriend", "girl friend", "boss", "co-worker", and "police officer". Repeated reminder: We learn these added categories in the context of social life but that does not mean the social group determines the world and our actions.

### **Intentions.**

People not only do, they intend to do. Intentions, including motives, are important.

In addition to having our own intentions, people evolved the ability to read intentions in other people and even in animals. We can read them, and we assume many of them can read us.

People have also evolved the ability to hide intentions or to send out misleading indications (lie about) intentions. This leads people into games, gamesmanship, confusion, and complexity. I don't have the space to go into it much here. See any movie about revenge.

The ability to manage intentions is important. It includes our own intentions, the intentions of many other selves, and intentions that we impute to groups as wholes. The ability to manage intent is the key to alliance. Humans are unusual in being able to manage many levels of intention: "Suzy said that Johnny knows that Emmy had a fight with Tommy because Emmy thought that Tommy likes Amy but really he likes Jenny and Emmy lied to Sally who told Karl that Tommy likes Amy". Most humans can handle about five levels of intention but are only comfortable through three. As a sexist, I think girls can handle more than boys. My ability is quite limited. I get antsy after one and dizzy after two. I am far below the ability of the California Cow in the TV ads. The ability to manage intentions is often taken as an important sign that an organism has a mind, and indicates the level of its mind. When we see that dogs can read the intentions of other dogs, sheep, and humans, we credit them with a pretty good mind.

### **Exchange.**

An important relation among people is a continuing “back and forth”, an augmented kind of “reciprocity”. This relation often uses the exchange of gifts and services. If John gives Jack a Swiss army knife, both John and Jack expect Jack will give something back someday. It need not be the exact same thing. In fact, in this case, to give back the exact same thing would be odd. Maybe Jack gives John some wild mushrooms. If Jack and John give back and forth like this, it shows they have a relation. The nature of the giving reflects the nature of the relation. If they give the exact same value every time, and the return a gift in a fairly short time, then the relation is a careful relation among equals. If sometimes one gives more and sometimes one gives less, and the same person is not “less” or “more” all the time, then they have a warm relation between friends. If Jack gives service such as tending the garden while John gives protection, it is a relation between a higher more powerful “patron” with his-her “client”. Changes in the nature of the relation are reflected in gifts. If Jack and John grow friendlier, they give gifts for the whole family. If they grow cooler, they give more evenly and they start leaving hints about overdue returns. Likely the most important kind of exchange was in marriage, and in giving your children to another family in marriage so that they would give their children to your family.

People exchange not just as individuals, or as particular families, but also in groups and as groups. It is called “indirect reciprocity”, “delayed reciprocity”, or “generalized reciprocity”. People give one thing and get another thing in return. We share food and tasks such as childcare. We give now and get back much later. We give to one member of a group both as an individual and as a representative of a group. Then we get paid back by another member of the group or by the group as a whole. Our group as a whole gives to another group as a whole. Think of circles of friends and neighbors holding barbecues and dinners, or hosting at various houses while watching “the big game” of the week.

### **Useful Distortions.**

It might seem that the more accurately an animal can know the world, the better it will do. Mostly this is true, but not always. Usually getting an accurate picture takes time and mental resources, and animals don’t always have that luxury. Sometimes animals have to act on the basis of imperfect information or have to act quickly. Sometimes it is better to have a basis for action even if the basis does not exactly reflect the world. When a deer hears rustling leaves, it has to decide to stay or to leap away, before it can investigate to find out for sure if the rustle is the wind or a wolf. When two male bears meet, they have to decide to fight or to run away, usually fairly quickly, and usually without a “middle ground” option. A cat pounces on a moving spot before it knows if the spot is a beetle, cricket, toad, or mouse; in that way, at least usually it gets something for dinner. A slightly inaccurate view of the world can be more useful than an exactly accurate view. I recommend the educational TV show “Brain Games”, which I saw on the National Geographic channel but might be on other channels too.

People also have to see the world slightly inaccurately sometimes. We see ourselves, spouses, children, siblings, friends, neighbors, fellow parishioners, co-workers, boss, and employees in a far better light than objective reality; and it helps all of us to do so. Seeing myself as better than others see me give me a big confidence boost, and helps things turn out as I hoped rather than as others guessed. If we did not see our spouses as beautiful, handsome, and really good, divorce would more common and reproduction would be less common. We see our rivals as much nastier than they really.

Misperception also can lead us to error and even down dark paths. I don’t go into this aspect here.

Life, finding a mate, and successful reproduction, require some irrationality and commitment. We can see irrationality and commitment as a variation on not perceiving the world exactly as it is but helpful anyhow. A rapid response to rustling leaves is irrational because inaccurate but it is useful overall. Every man and woman in a group wants to make sure nobody messes with his-her spouse. I strut around to make clear that anybody who does mess with my spouse will face a fight. My strutting around offering battle is an irrational commitment. Even if both fighters lose that particular fight, still, few people will mess with my spouse, fewer than if I did not threaten violence, and so I gain in the long run. All the other people learn to strut too. In this irrational committed situation, everybody has to strut around and so waste effort, but everybody is fairly secure in his-her relation, and so everybody is better off in the long run even at the cost of some short-term strutting.

In learning how to use fire, my child, the little demon, burns down the hut that we had just built and that was not yet full of vermin. It might be about as easy to make another child as to make another hut, but, if I took this attitude toward every child, especially toward every child every time he-she made a mistake, I would never keep any children. So I irrationally with strong commitment love this child. Thus through my irrational committed love I get past the occasional issues with children, I irrationally commit to love every child, and so I succeed in long-term reproductive success.

### **Seeing the World as Lively; Seeing A Lot of Persons.**

As part of seeing the world inaccurately for benefit, we see the world as more lively than it really is. Seeing the world as more lively is a better mistake than seeing the world as not lively enough or even as trying to see the world just exactly as lively as it really is. A classic example makes the point. A man is walking along a path in the fields when he sees a wiggly line a few feet ahead. If the wiggle is a stick, but the man takes it for a snake and jumps backward, he feels foolish, but also he lives to walk again another day. His genes for his lively imagination reproduce. If the wiggle is a cobra, and the man strides along thinking it is foolish to jump at shadows that are likely only sticks, he dies, and his genes for a stodgy realistic non-imagination die with him. In a world of uncertainty and danger, we are often better off seeing the world as lively. Humans see the world as very lively, far livelier than a robot might see the world. We tend to see life, action, will, intent, goals, groups, coalitions, conspiring, and conniving much more than are really there. Children take as obvious that animals can think talk. We give our cars personalities and names ("I named him 'Brad'"). We talk to our computers. We see spirits. Our lively world was important in the evolution of religion.

Among the most useful misconceptions is thinking of a group as if it were one big individual person with the appropriate collective abilities to act, have intentions, manage intentions, and have relations. It is easier to treat most individuals in a group as if they had a similar collective personality and abilities. We do that by thinking of them all as part of the giant individual that is the group. This could be one way that groups dominate human members but it is also simply a useful way to think about group-and-members without entailing the conclusion that the group is always above the individual.

When we deal with groups, we create a "generalized other", a big generalized person that stands for a group, and with which we can think about groups, especially the several groups to which we belong and the groups with which we (and our group) have important relations. A big group is an "other" because it is

not exactly us, and we use it as an external reference to assess our thinking and where we stand. In the modern world, we have several generalized others. They include the firm or school that we work for, our occupation and the people in it such as farming or music, our socio-economic class, our nation, and our religious group.

Sometimes “other” refers to people and groups not in our group. They are “other than us”, and we tend to treat them as if they differ from us in important ways and alike in being different. We tend to divide our social and natural world in various “us” and “them” according to situations. We have our gender and the other genders, our age group and other age groups, our family and other families, our foraging group and other foraging groups, we who are like wolves and other people who are like ravens. Common cases in the modern world include other schools, ethnic groups, religions, genders, socio-economic classes, etc.

To help ourselves deal with groups, we split ourselves in two internally, into two “persons”. One of the internal people represents us as an individual while the other represents the group-as-a-whole that we are thinking about now. For example, I think of the “I” that I am as a distinct person in the family and the “me” that I am as a member of the family and by relating to other family members, especially by taking on the common identity of our family, and by taking on the common identity of our family in distinction to other families. By having both an internal distinct “I” and an internal distinct “me” to represent groups, we can think “in our heads” about the intentions of groups and our relation to groups. We can play out scenes “in our heads” about what other people might do, what we might do in response, what they might do in response, and so on. One of the people in our heads acts like a conscience. It helps to keep moral standards and a moral record. These mental games can lead to dizziness, and sometimes to illness, but most of us have evolved the ability to control them as we play them and to use them well.

We belong to several groups at the same time; and there are other groups that we don’t belong to but that we have to relate to. We belong to a family, a neighborhood, congregation, work situation, area group, gender, hunting buddies, etc. The group under current consideration is a “reference group”. People have many reference groups depending on context and situation.

### **Means and Ends Again.**

The “ultimate” goal in evolution is family success (reproductive success and inclusive fitness). To achieve family success, we need to meet other goals along the way and develop various abilities: good relations in the family; good relations with other families; friends; allies; reciprocal relations with other people; good relations with the spirits; reputation; food; security; sex; prestige; wealth; and power. These “goals along the way” and various abilities are called “proximate goals” or “proximate mechanisms” to contrast with the one ultimate goal.

In the modern world, most of our proximate mechanisms are not actions that people did throughout most of human history but actions derived from more basic abilities. Most people do not walk around looking for fruits, vegetables, and small game but instead get in a car that takes them to work. In the modern world, usually we meet proximate goals through one major derived proximate goal: our paid work. We get money from our job with which we acquire mates, food, housing, children, power, etc. In the modern world, men don’t impress a woman by bringing home a dead deer but by driving a big fast car; women

don't impress men with their ability to fill a gathering bag with apples and rabbits but by taking care of an apartment and working as a realtor at the same time.

People do not have to be aware that proximate goals serve family success for the proximate goals to do their job. People have sex because it feels good and not only to have exactly the right number of children to achieve long-term family success. People eat because it tastes good and makes our bellies feel good. People tell stories because it is fun and not necessarily because they know it impresses members of the opposite sex.

Proximate goals can take on a life of their own, as when people enjoy hunting so much that it gets in the way of a good family life, or enjoy sex so much that they seduce a neighbor's spouse and get killed for it. Evolution made sure that proximate actions always served family success over the long run, at least in the context of our evolutionary history. People enjoyed sex but just the right ways, and in just the right amounts, to make sure they reproduced well.

### **Mental Modules.**

When a wolverine meets a badger, buckeye, lion, or bear, both have to decide right now to fight or to flee. There is no time to carefully assess the overall situation. The wolverine and bear can't stop to consider the weather, what they had for breakfast, if they need to pee, the footing, and if the other animal looks normally tough or really tough. To make sure to act, sometimes it is better if action is controlled by an independent "module" that is triggered off when the situation arises. Animals don't stop to consider the whole world when they see a piece of ripe fruit. They just grab that piece of fruit and eat it. When male animals see a female animal in heat, they go after her. "Going after sex" is a good candidate for a distinct mental module that gets triggered off in the right situations almost regardless of anything else. Many behaviors are better seen in terms of activating modules than in terms of some large overall rational program making all decisions in all conditions. If we consider all the modules together as the mind, then animals have "modular minds". If animals have modular minds, then humans likely do too. Many of the same modules that activate in animals are in humans too, such as sexual arousal and the smell of good food. Of course, modules don't operate completely in isolation. During rutting season, a deer has to decide between sex versus avoiding oncoming wolves. How modules relate is not very well known yet. The fact that modules connect still does not mean the mind is one connected rational system. Modularity is currently a hot, and fun, topic in evolutionary studies.

### **Imitation.**

People don't have to fully understand a successful strategy to act successfully; they just have to do it. If people can recognize other successful people and imitate them, they can be about as successful as the original people without understanding at all. Imitating might be an example of a group of related mental modules. A lot of learning begins first as imitation. Imitation is an example of a complicated module that "goes off" in the right situations.

### **Comparative Competition.**

Evolutionary success is almost always comparative. If Danny-the-buck-deer has three does in his family, it seems Danny has done well until we know that Benny-the-buck has five. If Emily-the-doe has two healthy fawns every three years then it appears she has done well until we learn that Doris-the-doe has four healthy fawns every three years. Once every three years, Doris has a set of twins, both of which survive. Over time, the offspring of Benny and Doris will become the deer population. Benny and Doris comparatively out-compete Danny and Emily. Over time, the ancestors of Benny and Doris are what a deer is.

In human terms, comparative competition is “keeping up with the Joneses”. It doesn’t matter how much we have; it matters how much we have compared to them. A big problem with comparative competition is that it has no intrinsic stopping point. When the goal is not “x” amount but “more than them”, then there is never “enough”. Comparative competition is the source of much grief in human life. It is also the source of some progress as a spur to action and development.

### **Manipulation.**

Recall our susceptibility and recall that people use susceptibility to advantage. We don’t like to admit that we manipulate others, especially other people in our group, because that makes us not “good guys”, and can even get us cut out of the group. We hate to accept that we get manipulated. Yet we do manipulate other people, even within our group, and we let them manipulate us.

Manipulation is a mutual game. Manipulation does not have to be all bad. Almost nobody manipulates others without also getting manipulated. We are not too suspicious of people who do a little manipulating as long as we can see that they also get manipulated from time to time. People allow themselves to be manipulated a bit because everybody does it. If we didn’t let other people manipulate us, then they would be very strict about not letting us manipulate them. Manipulation is part of the “little white lies” that let people get along and get their own way while other people get their way too. As with other abilities, some people are more adept at manipulation, and so benefit more than others, but that does not stop the game as long as the adept people are not too much more adept.

Seeing the world inaccurately, susceptibility, and manipulation go together. We are susceptible when we see the world inaccurately, even when we usually do so for our benefit. Our susceptibility makes us easier to manipulate, or, alternatively, the susceptibility of other people makes it easier for us to fool and manipulate them.

“Seeing” is a metaphor here for all kinds of perception and mental activity including thinking. Thinking something is so when it is not, or not quite so, also is seeing the world inaccurately for our benefit. Wolverines and honey badgers think they can “take on” animals that are much larger and stronger than themselves such as bears, hyenas, and lions. Because they think so, often they can – but not always.

### **Self Deception.**

Thinking about the world inaccurately can also be “fooling ourselves”. We fool ourselves about our own abilities, the abilities of our spouses, children, and other kin, and the abilities of our rivals. We fool

ourselves about our own moral rectitude and about how vile our rivals are. When we fool ourselves, we are susceptible.

Evolution made sure that most of the time, when we fool ourselves, we gain more than we lose, as when we think we have the moral high ground, and so gain courage. But sometimes we fool ourselves and lose. No adaptation is perfect. Not every time that a David goes up against a Goliath does David win. Not ever every time we think we can outrun a lion, or outguess the stock market, do we win. Sometimes fooling ourselves can lead to mental illness.

Even if we did not fool ourselves, other people would still have some ability to lie to us and so manipulate us. The fact that we do fool ourselves widens the door for others to fool us and manipulate us. Flattery really does work. Men want to think they are big, strong, and shrewd, and women, among others, use that self-deception to manipulate men. It is not PC to say that women want to think they are pretty, so I will just say that women also have qualities that they want to think apply to them, and men, among others, can use those qualities to manipulate women. Parents often use the desire of children to be more grown up than they really are to fool them. Children use the desire of parents to be more wise and authoritative than they really are to fool them.

### **Resistance is not Futile.**

If we were too easily duped, we could not reproduce. Natural selection made sure we have resistance to being fooled and manipulated by others. We cannot completely disbelieve everything everybody says (“all clients lie to their lawyers, and to detectives, all the time”) because then we would lose the benefits of information and of group life; we have to trust red lights; but we also have to be wary. Evolution gave us the ability to filter. Our ability to filter is good but not perfect. In our evolutionary history, we have run an “arms race” between the people that lie versus finding out lies. Believe it or not, we are usually better at finding out lies, at least over the long run, than people are at lying.

To fool somebody is to put your thoughts in his-her head. See the old movie “Angel on His Shoulder”. We are susceptible to having thoughts put into our heads, both by people that want to share information with us and by people that lie to fool us and use. Groups (made of individuals) also can put thoughts into our heads, both as part of sharing beneficial knowledge in the group, such as where the berries are, and as part of fooling us. The fact that we can fool ourselves makes it easier for a group to put thoughts into our heads and to manipulate us. Our wife’s kin can fool us into thinking her children are our children, even though they are not, so we will take care of her and her children. Everybody in the group “just knows” that the gods will punish you if you eat meat on Friday. As with the battle between liars versus finding out liars, our evolutionary history featured a battle between the ideas that we hold because we think they are true versus the ideas that the group puts into our heads. Often we accept the ideas of the group, especially when they help us to succeed, or when they are neutral. If the group can show me how to kill deer or appease the gods with a cucumber, fine. Sometimes we don’t accept the ideas, especially when they hinder our success or allow other people to dominate us. Yes, some of us do jump off bridges because our cool friends do it but most of us don’t.

The idea (1) that the group can put ideas (2) into our heads leads quickly to the idea (3) that we are just a part of the group, the group controls us, and the group is more real than we are. It reinforces the idea (4)

that, as social scientists, we better understand individuals in terms of group ideas and group organization than in terms of individual ideas and individual pursuit of success. While the first idea (groups put ideas into our heads) is true, the third idea (we are a mere blob in a dominant group) is only partly true at best. Group dominance is a topic of much contention among social scientists. For this book, I accept that the group can put ideas in our heads, and we get a lot of ideas in our heads through our cultural heritage; but I also assert that we can think if we need to, and we do not accept for very long ideas (5) that damage our ability to compete and to reproduce. I cannot here go into details. I return to this topic in various ways in several places.

### **Rank.**

People rank each other in various ways for various reasons: health, body build, symmetry, memory, smell, talking skill, intelligence, imagination, strength, beauty, speed, memory, artistic ability, geniality, family size, size of social group, social connection, hunting ability, gathering ability, fecundity, skill with children, prestige, etc. The standards for ranking do not all coincide so people can rank high in some ways but low in others. Some features can make up for others, as, for example, social graces can make up for being a bit tall and skinny. Although not hunter-gatherers, among the Thai, I found social prestige and social connections to be quite important, and able to make up for some differences in wealth. Even so, aspects of rank do tend to coincide so some people tend to rank generally high while some people tend to rank generally low, with a lot of people in the middle.

Contrary to current political correctness but coinciding with what people do anyway, people use rank to sort out marital partners and sex partners. A “4” might seek a “10” but does not really expect to marry one. A “6”, man or woman, is afraid of being a mere sex toy for a “10”. A “9” seeks a “10”, and might get one, depending on whether enough “10s” are readily available for them to seek one. The “9” might have to settle for an “8”, and be glad to do so. In the modern world, people tend to rely on external appearance for rank and for choices about marital partner and sex partner, but traditionally, family, social connections, social rank, prestige, temperament, wealth, ability to earn, diligence in work, age, and ability to give security likely ranked higher; they are still quite important.

### **Categories of People and Mating.**

Because people tended to marry and have sex according to rank, age, religion, language, and culture (“[positive] assortative mating”), the group and the people in it tended to separate into segments, a bit like modern socio-economic class but not exactly so. A few families might commonly intermarry and maintain themselves at the top of a socio-economic-prestige-beauty hierarchy. Because life was so unsteady in our evolutionary past, these strata likely were not stable for more than two generations. A few setbacks, or windfalls, could completely change the hierarchy in small groups. People could “marry up” and “move up”, and they actively looked to do so. People feared falling, and acted to keep their station.

### **Gossip.**

People evolved to gossip. Contrary to current popular ideas, gossip in our evolutionary past likely acted more like a social glue to keep people connected than as a weapon to divide people, although it could be both (see Robin Dunbar in the Bibliography). Secrets might have been part of gossip but likely were not

limited to gossip and included aspects of life such as hunting, power blocs, relations to other groups, and religion. I can understand cherishing some secrets but I don't know why people evolved to relish secrets so much. People put a metaphysical "spin" on their secrets. Still, the taste plays a role in religion, ideas about "us and them", and group relations.

Among our proximate mechanisms, evolution gave us ways to do things and not do things according to their likely impact on our success: pleasure and pain, imitation, many emotions, rational consideration, advice from other people, beauty and ugliness, moral feelings, and religious feelings. These ways cannot be reduced to pleasure and pain. Usually what felt good was good for us in the original environment in which we evolved. Eating fatty food usually was helpful when we had to walk five miles a day to get any food at all. All animals feel pleasure and pain, many animals have emotions, and many animals imitate, but few animals have the other methods that evolution developed to get us to do or not to do. It is not clear why evolution developed so many methods with people, or needed so many methods, and I can't go into the topic here, other than what I say briefly about religion and morality. I comment briefly more on beauty toward the end of the chapter.

#### **PART 4: Optional: Lessons from Nature and Evolution about God.**

##### **Violence, Good, Bad, and God's Plan.**

Nature is beautiful, good, ugly, and bad. We are all familiar with the beauty and goodness, so I skip over that except for one point. Unless (1) natural laws (such as about gravity, electricity, radioactivity, bonding in atomic nucleuses, etc.) are set almost exactly as they are now in our universe, within a narrow range, and (2) are set together exactly as they are so they interact as they do within that narrow range, then (3) life-as-we-know-it could not have evolved. This fact does not prove some far-sighted intelligent planner set natural laws that way, but it is strong circumstantial evidence. Indirect evidence for God can be based on this idea of natural laws and their settings, and the case is strong (see chapter on atheism). This issue is what I had to leave out in this chapter, regrettably.

On the bad side, Nature contains a lot of violence and chaos. Half-a-dozen times, the Earth has been nearly covered with ice or has been ripped up by volcanoes. From time to time, nearly all life on Earth goes extinct, only to be replaced by other orders of life, which in turn perish. Meteors strike Earth, and totally change the climate for thousands of years. Sometimes one kind of life itself causes these great changes by polluting the Earth and killing off its fellows. New kinds of life could not flourish unless old kinds die off sometimes, as when the death of the dinosaurs opened the door for mammals. Some things that happen in nature seem not just violent but bad or even evil. Bugs eat other bugs while the other bugs are still alive, paralyzing their prey, and devouring their prey slowly over a period of weeks; one kind of bug enslaves another kind; parents eat their young; baby birds steal food from each others' mouths; sibling bugs eat each other; sibling mammals kill and devour their siblings in the womb; and cancer eats children from the inside for no apparent gain to anybody.

On the one hand, nature seems to say there is a very intelligent God who planned everything within close tolerances, could see a long way ahead, wanted life, wanted sentient-moral-aesthetic beings, and loves beauty. On the other hand, nature seems to say God puts up with chaos, violence, upheaval, poison, life eating life, badness, and even evil. Rather than value all life for itself alone, God seems to use one kind

of life simply as a tool to set the stage for other kinds of life. God does not mind sacrificing innocent life on a large scale. God likely uses bad and evil, not because he has too, but just because he does. That is not the kind of behavior that any major religion wants to see of God.

When we see badness in nature, and know its role in evolution, we tend to think that natural badness is an inevitable by-product of evolution. We have to put up with one thing to get another. We could not have males without females and vice versa. We could not have flowers without bees. We could not have hawks without sparrows for them to eat. We could not have interesting life without germs, parasites, age, decay, and death. Nature could not evolve humans without a lot of bad, and some evil, along the way. The same process that gives us sentient-moral-aesthetic beings insures that some natural evil persists. Still, we have to wonder why God could not set up nature so sentient beings evolved without natural badness, or at least without a lot less than we see on Earth. Either God is limited in his ability to set up nature or else God doesn't mind some badness and some evil.

I do not know what to make of this situation. If God has a plan for life, it seems the plan is bigger than my simplistic ideas of morality, duty, honor, decency, and kindness. I have to accept the situation, and move on. Although badness exists, sometimes wins, and seems to be a tool of God, it also seems goodness outweighs badness overall. The fact that goodness usually dominates is the fact that we have to work with. It seems God went to a lot of trouble to make sure sentience and morality arose in creation, so they must be important to him. I can't see anything more important. To act morally must be to act in accord with God's wishes. We come closer to "playing God" when we act morally than when we act nasty or when we act for power. We cannot become "little gods" by acting "above" morality through acting badly or through indulging our selfish wishes. We do have to mix practicality with morality but that does not mean we abandon morality or somehow rise "above" it.

The idea that the universe shows signs of being designed to produce sentient-moral-religious-aesthetic life is called the "anthropic principle". The name is off a bit because "anthropos" means "human" yet the idea applies to all sentient etc. life even on other planets. The idea cannot be proved or disproved, so it is not scientific. Most people who think about it understand that it is not science. As far as I can tell, most people who entertain it share many of my attitudes. I think the idea is common among physical scientists although not often stated or discussed. Enlightenment thinkers likely would approve it.

### **Me as Machine.**

When people see that we have evolved, and that many of our mental abilities are evolved such as our ability to like other people and to assess justice, they get upset. They think it robs them of their soul; it makes God and everything interesting not needed. They think it makes are mere scribbling or aimless whistling. From the outside, I understand that point of view, but it puzzles me that people are so upset by it. Suppose I am a merely evolved very clever machine. Because I learn, I am both the hardware of my genes and development, and I am the software made up of things that I have chosen and learned. That is all that is needed for God to assess me and do something with me that suits his needs. I have a form and I have content. Whatever has a form and content can be assessed. Likely it can be reproduced in another medium and the reproduction can be assessed. When I die, my body decays, and a lot of what I was here on Earth while alive decays away forever. So what? If, after I die, if God wants, God can reproduce my form and content in whatever medium pleases him, and assess that. That is close enough

to me so that I don't worry over any difference and any metaphysical implications. The mind of God is a suitable medium. Maybe God assess the memory of me that still lingers in his mind. That also is close enough to me so that I don't worry about it. Wanting more is wanting too much.

Suppose you had an amazingly complex car that had learned things such as the most efficient way to avoid the police when you had been smoking "weed". When the car died, couldn't you still assess it? Wouldn't you still assess it? Wouldn't your assessment affect what cars you bought in the future? Can't you assess computer programs and assess what they have learned and done? Can't you assess an animal and what it has learned and done? There is not enough difference between me, the car, the computer program, and an animal for me to worry over.

### **Optimal Expression; Right Balance; Inner Logic.**

"Abilities" includes physical abilities such as running, intellectual abilities such as to play music or do law, and emotions such as anger at neighbors and love for our own children. To "express" an ability (trait) is to show it to a certain extent. Some people run faster; some run faster in games such as soccer; and some run faster when pursuing a game animal. Some people sing a lot while some sing not at all. Some people sing well while others sing badly. Some traits (abilities) are under strong genetic control such as eye color but they are not of much interest here. The abilities of interest here have some genetic control but also are learned and depend on choice and desire, such as abilities for golf, singing country music, or getting on well with neighbors. People vary in natural aptitude for abilities and in the extent to which they express abilities. Part of variation in extent is due to underlying natural (genetically based) variation and part is due to differences in learning and choice. I don't sort out this issue. If you want a strong version of the argument here, limit the arena to our evolutionary past as hunter-gatherers. The ideas also apply now to a large extent but I can't argue the issue here.

The fact that we have an ability means that, overall, the ability had value in evolutionary (reproductive) success or else natural selection would not have kept it and shaped it. Not all the abilities that we see were obvious in natural selection but instead result from other underlying abilities that were important in natural selection in our hunter-gatherer past. There were no concert pianists in the plains of North Africa but there are concert pianists now based on what did happen in Africa. Natural selection might have kept the ability to argue persuasively but natural selection did not keep the ability to go to court every time the neighbor's dog pees on our sidewalk roses. We can misuse abilities from how natural selection originally shaped them, especially in modern life that is removed from our hunter-gatherer past. We evolved to flirt but not in "meat market" pickup bars. I can't sort out these issues here. Accept that abilities have a natural evolved basis but also are learned and depend on choices.

In our original environment, we expressed abilities as a way to get evolutionary reproductive success and we still often do now. We express any one ability to the right extent, at the right times, in the right places, in the right social context, in a balance with all our abilities. Trees do not send out leaves at all times of the year but only when to do so does the most good for reproduction. Most flowers don't bloom full tilt all year. Lions do not prowl hungry and ready to kill all the time even after they had a big meal yesterday. People don't talk politics and religion all the time; if they do, they soon have no friends and fewer family members. People talk politics and religion when it matters and it works. People don't run to every place they have to go nor do they walk – sometimes even in cities in the era of smart phones they still do walk

and run. Hopefully even stereotyped women don't cry with every minor disappointment. Hopefully even stereotyped men don't hit every man who doesn't step out of their path. We don't "put the moves" on every person we see, male, female, young, old, married, or single. Except in Hollywood and Bollywood musicals, people don't sing and dance their way down the street but they do sing and dance and play the guitar sometimes. Whether man or woman, playing guitar well usually makes you interesting and often helps you "get laid".

It is hard to give a sense of a balance of abilities in a few lines so all I can do here is point out that we do have to trade off some abilities for others, and I can suggest a balance. We love each of our children but we cannot love them so much that we stay with them all the time and we don't go get food, shelter, and clothes. We can love hunting but we can't love it so much that we never bother to bring back what we kill, or we never come home to make love to a spouse or display love to children. We can love a pet but not usually more than our children. We can love figuring out the weather because to do so is useful but we can't spend so much time figuring weather that we don't use the information to go hunt and gather in the right times and places and we neglect social duties. In modern times, students need family life, social life, love life, entertainment, sports, hobbies, art, and many intellectual pursuits, all in the right doses. Exactly how much that we show (do, feel, or think) is not rigid but is partially learned.

In our past, natural selection set the correct extent of expression and the balance automatically for us. In our present, we have to use more of our judgment but we still rely heavily on the tendencies and general balance that natural selection set for us about 200,000 years ago.

To see abilities more clearly, think of the most useful extent of expression in given situations. Expression can be underdone and overdone. Think how any given ability balances with other abilities. Just right, underdone, and overdone usually only make sense in context. It is more useful to think of human traits-abilities in these ways than to take them in total isolation as just a quality that we have or don't have, such as that we have religion or don't have abilities to digest wood or fly. Looking at abilities this way is useful when facing dilemmas about human nature such as the standard quandary of emotion versus reason.

To get a better sense of abilities, expression, and balance, it helps to develop the ability to see the inner logic of particular abilities, such as, for example, the logics of seeing, hearing, anger, and morality. Most traits do have some logic. I cannot here go into the logic of any particular abilities or how to cultivate the feel for the logic. I do discuss the logic of morality. Without a feel for the logic of particular abilities, likely we make mistakes in how we understand them, in terms of evolution or otherwise.

### **Emotions and Biological Explanations; More on "Nothing But".**

Not only the West, but maybe especially the West, has been caught in a false dilemma between reason versus emotion. You had to choose one or the other. Until about 1800, usually reason was good while emotion was bad. After 1800, they reversed status, although there are still bad emotions and emotion can serve bad ends. Usually emotion is crazy and demonic while reason is sane and angelic. Reason is rational while emotion must be irrational by definition. Men are sanely rational while women are crazily emotional. All this caused needless confusion and mistakes. I see the distinction between reason and emotion, and sometimes it can be useful, but not often. All this confusion can be reduced by thinking that we have several abilities to reason and many emotions, and all of them usually are expressed to the right

extent in the right situations, are part of a balance, but can be misused. The problem cannot be made to vanish by seeing it this way but you will worry about it less.

Emotions are like religion and morality. Emotions usually are productive, as when we love our siblings despite small faults, and so help them to live past the faults and grow up to reproduce nephews and nieces. If emotions weren't productive most of the time that we show them, natural selection would not have kept them to the extent that we have them. Some emotions are unproductive, as when we sock the boss or chase our neighbor's spouse. Natural selection would have changed those in the past.

We can think too much and we can think in the wrong ways. Should I use my intellect to figure out how deer move and feed in this valley or should I do something else such as listen to the advice of all the old men, wander aimlessly, or follow a grid? Should I spend a week figuring out deer patterns given that my wife's cousin just killed a big buffalo and we all will eat well for a week? Should I spend a week figuring out deer tracks given that nobody in our band has killed in a week and my children, siblings, cousins, nephews, and nieces are hungry now? In the past, natural selection would have shaped how much we use reason in particular situations.

The Darwinian account of the emotions is 80 percent correct. The remaining 20 percent, when filled in eventually by theorists and field workers, won't contradict the current 80 percent.

The Darwinian account is a rational (strategic) account of seemingly irrational behavior. It seems reason does trump emotion after all. Yet to insist on this dichotomy here is really a philosophical prejudice and shows the confusion that arises when we insist on a dichotomy between emotion and reason.

Because we practically define emotions by their irrationality yet the Darwinist account is rational, it can help to look more at the Darwinist account. The best presenter of this view is Robert Frank, an economist with a keen sense for the logic of situations and for evolutionary logic. Sometimes what seems like the best short-term strategy really is not best over the long run. Over the long run, this strategy bleeds us in little bits and actually hurts us overall. The long-term bleeding more than erodes any short term gain. In that case, we need to give up what seems like the best strategy and to adopt another strategy that might not seem as rational (effective) but really is more effective. A classic example is the school bully with the stereotyped fatherly advice to stand up to him-her. If we have to pay the bully 3 dollars a day for 200 school days per year for 10 years, then we pay \$6000 over the time in school and we don't get the lunch that we need, thereby stunting our growth, our intellect, our school work, our pride, feeling of self-esteem, and whole future. If we stand up to the bully, we might get hurt for a short while, but we stop paying, if only because the authorities see the situation. So we gain back all we might have lost, and gain respect from comrades. Even if we lose at fisticuffs, we gain in other ways. All we have to do is screw up the courage to get hit. In real life, the situation is not this simple. Don't stand up to bar bullies or street thugs unless you have been well trained and have talent. Still, the logic makes sense once we think it out fully over the long run and we see that a short term stand can yield long term benefits.

In this episode of passion, we show as much bravery and commitment as needed for the situation. We don't show bravery and stern commitment in all situations, or to this extent. Passion and commitment are closely tied. To understand emotions, you also have to study commitment including the lack thereof. I

don't make much of this connection here but I mention it because it is important if you read more about the subject.

Fine; Darwin takes this field and all fields; everything supports reproductive success over the long run; and everything is strategic practicality in disguise. We can see everything entirely and only in terms of reproductive success. We can reduce all human life to nothing but that. If this way is the only way we look, we are like the old Freudians who saw sex behind everything, like old existentialists who saw a commitment to personal being behind all, or like ethnologists who see cultural rules as the overwhelming dominant force in human life.

In fact, anger, love, jealousy, threats, courting, friendship, deep friendship, etc. are not the same even if they all do have the overall effect of increasing reproductive success. They all have a different internal logic, a different internal feel. They also each have a distinct way that they fit together to form a whole field. They are both distinct and overlap. How they fit together depends on their internal logic, and their internal logic depends on how they fit together.

In practice, Darwinians intuitively use their feel for emotions and for the logic of emotions when they think through how an emotion works and how it helps reproductive success. I cannot go through how thinking-through-with-the-help-of-an-intuitive-feel happens other than what I gave above. It would be very hard to work through how an emotion helped reproductive success if we did not also have an intuitive feel for its inner logic and for how it fits in with other emotions.

All this would be fine too if there was a theory of the internal logic of each emotion, and a general theory of emotional logic, how the emotions worked as a whole set, how they interact, overlap, and are distinct. Psychologists have made considerable progress but there is still no such general theory.

As long as there is no such general theory, Darwinians have to explain each emotion separately in terms of how it aids reproductive success, in that way alone; and Darwinians have to use their intuitive feel for the structure of each emotion to help them do that.

Just because do Darwinians succeed so well, Darwinians become less sensitive to the need for a general theory of emotions, the need to see the internal logic of each emotion, and the need to see how emotions interact. Darwinians lapse into a mostly successful but also limiting reductionism and "nothing but".

Without a clear view of the logic of each emotion, sometimes we can get confused about how any given emotion helps reproductive success even if we are not biased against the idea that emotions are mostly about helping reproductive success. If we did not understand how love differs from "mate guarding"-though-coercion then we would not understand either love or mate guarding. Quick success in seeing how an emotion might have served reproductive success ironically can block long-term greater insight into how this emotion and all emotions evolved. It helps to think in terms of plausible obvious ways to serve reproductive success, the internal feel (logic) of the emotion, and how that internal structure might have affected how this emotion evolved.

Despite that Darwinists overlook the logic of emotions, overlook relations between emotions, and lapse into explaining away as nothing but, I still prefer them to critics who doubt that evolution shaped behavior,

mind, and emotions, and doubt that emotions still serve reproductive success. I still prefer them to critics who assert that society, culture, or a socio-economic-political-adaptive system, creates all emotions and determines all the content and objects of emotions. It is easier to escape mistakes of Darwinist reduction than to escape from self-imposed blindness to evolution or blindness that reduces all mind, behavior, and emotion to society, culture, system, economics, or hegemony.

In the long run, Darwinists will use their intuitive feel for emotions combined with their commitment to the idea that emotions help reproductive success to make a more general theory in which each emotion has a place in the total constellations of emotions. Then, a more explicit view of the logic of each emotion will arise along with the general theory. I look forward to that.

Much the same comments about emotion apply to other fields such as all the arts. Yes, the ability to blow a horn, bang a drum, sketch a deer, or dance, all can lead to greater reproductive success. But, if those are the only terms in which we can think of melody, rhythm, drawing, moving, and any art, then we will not be able to fully see how they work in reproductive success and fully see how they evolved, or appreciate them apart from evolution as they deserve.

Please keep these comments in mind for the Parts below on the evolution of religion and morality.

#### **PART 5: Optional: The Semi-Whole Self.**

This Part of this chapter is needed for later chapters in optional Part Two of the Book, and for chapters in Part Four of the book on Buddhism, Taoism, Zen, and Hinduism. Part Two of the book has a chapter on the self that makes many of the same points as here but some people will not read Part Two.

#### **Both Together and Separate.**

Any evolved organism, including a human person, is both a unified whole and a fragmented grab bag of separate genes, organs, chemicals, structures, events, acts, traits, processes, modules, and learning. I explain “fragmented grab bag” below. It is impossible to declare categorically that persons are either a simple unified whole or merely a fragmented grab bag with no unity at the center. (I ignore essentialist thinking and the basis for essentialism in our evolved past.)

People hold different views on the unity or fragmentation of the human self according to the needs of the people holding the view. For example, people want the self to be one unified simple metaphysical whole, a soul, or like a soul, if they believe in Christianity, Islam, most kinds of Hinduism, Platonism, and most “New Age”. In contrast, people who want to avoid responsibility say “my genes for that one particular bad trait made me do it but otherwise I am a good guy so don’t send me to jail”.

People who oppose traditional religions sometimes stress the fragmented self as a way to argue against the soul so as to argue against traditional religions. People who defend traditional religions stress unity of the self as a way to defend the eternal soul so as to defend traditional religions.

The psychological, legal, political, evolved, rational, or emotional self is not the real issue but is only a means. I am not concerned with attacking or defending traditional religions or the soul. I do not use the

self as a way to get at the soul to get at traditional religions one way or the other. I do not use the self as a means to another end. I focus on the evolved self. Try to see through arguments that use the self as a way to argue other issues.

For the purposes of this book, I don't have to decide categorically. Even without being a single unified whole, even without being an eternal soul, and even if the self has a lot of loosely associated parts, still the human self is unified enough for God to do with us what he wants when we die. The self is unified enough for the legal and political systems in a democracy. The self is unified enough for morality, as, for example, to learn good and bad, and for praise and blame. The self is unified enough for the Golden Rule to make sense, and for us to know the legal implications of "applies equally" and "rule of law". The self is unified enough for parenting and schooling. I like to think about the unity and fragmentation of the self but, for me, this activity is mostly for fun and scientific curiosity.

Children often first see the non-unity of the self when they realize that people change over time. Is your 10-year-old naïve childish self the same as your 13-year-old experienced "mature" self? Is the geeky self of high school the same as when you are a parent, employee, business person, or professional? Could your parents once have been cool? The same idea applies also to dogs, cats, houses, cars, and chairs. In a later chapter in this book, I show how this insight is used to "pick apart" almost any object and many ideas, sometimes fairly, often unfairly.

We simply have to work with the selves (or self) as they arise in particular arenas - and we can do that. We evolved abilities to do that. We have to argue among our fellows and change our minds sometimes, and we can do that too.

Likely the natural evolved "fallback" position of most nearly-sentient organisms or fully sentient organisms (cats, dogs, apes, people) is simply to assume the self is one whole nearly-unified thing despite changes. Likely we evolved to see selves this way. That is a good short-term strategy and there are few reasons to think about the long term. Our paramour is the same person over the space of a few months and there are few reasons to dwell on whether he-she is the same person over a few years. We deal with that self when it develops. We can deal with changes of heart too, like falling in and out of love, and we don't think of those changes as undermining the unified selfness of me, my girlfriend, or boyfriend. If a bully intends to beat me up then likely he-she intends to beat me up in the morning and afternoon. If the bully "finds God" and doesn't beat me up in the afternoon, then I don't worry if he-she is the same. If Joe is my friend today then likely he intends to be my friend next week too.

We find it easier to think of mental abilities, especially intentions, if we think of them as coming from one single fairly unified person. We know that people have various intentions, and that intentions can conflict, but we hope we can unify it all on a higher level. Otherwise, it is hard to deal with other organisms (other people). It takes a lot of time and energy to think of them as bundles of distinct intentions. It is easier to think of them being as unified and consistent as possible. We like to think Joe's generosity works with his reserved dignity because Joe is overall a standup guy. We see how our dog can protect our children but bark at neighbor kids when we recall that dogs evolved for pack life where packs were composed of one large family and that different packs were often rivals. We evolved to see this way.

Humans hold on hard to the natural fallback position of one single unified whole person despite changes. We want to think of ourselves and fellow humans that way. We want to think of animals, plants, rocks, mountains, rivers, oceans, storms, and stars that way. This way of looking has a basis in evolved human nature, which likely means that it had strong success value in our past.

Just because unity is the natural evolved fallback position does not mean we are each an eternal soul, either as distinct individuals (Christianity and Islam) or as parts of an eternal system (some Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism). Just because unity is the natural evolved fallback position does not mean the self is not at all unified and is simply a mixed jumble. Just because we evolved to see selves and to think of selves as largely coherent does not mean either that selves are totally incoherent or simple eternal souls. What we evolved to see does not force us to conclude. We can use a variety of evidence, including what we evolved to see, to decide what we think about the coherence of human selves.

For here, it is more useful to dwell on how modern Darwinism has come to see the human self not quite as unified as religious people and philosophers previously thought of the self. Most marked points below describe a mental trait that needs to be taken much on its own regardless of what else is going on in the self. Because these mental traits would have supported success, natural selection made sure we had the means for these traits almost regardless of what else was going on in the self. Evolution supported the creation, maintenance, and distinct operation of separate mental “modules” made of genes and learning to make sure these mental traits happened when needed. When we think of the self this way, it is easy to think of the self as nothing but an accidental collection of useful behavioral modules, a fragmented grab bag. We should not go that far.

-A mental “trait” and mental “ability” are the same. If human individuals are one whole single self-person, and all humans are human, then all our various mental abilities should not vary too much from individual to individual, and various mental abilities should come together. Everybody should be able to reason and talk, everybody should be able to reason well enough and talk well enough, and reasoning and talking should come together nearly all the time. The abilities to reason, talk, enjoy music, recognize a few birds or cars, and wear clothes should all come together.

A little variation in mental abilities between people is part of what makes us individual as persons, and is charming. But too much variation undercuts the idea that people are one whole single self-person. This problem with variability is one reason why mentally handicapped people make us uneasy: not because they are creepy, hard to be around, hard to work with, or require extra care, but because they undercut what we think of people in general and of ourselves as a person.

In fact: 1) Many mental abilities are distinct from other mental abilities (they vary independently).

(2) Individual people vary in mental abilities. Particular distinct traits vary from person to person. People vary in the extent to which distinct mental abilities are developed.

(3) Mental abilities don't all come together as a whole unified set, especially not one set that is typical of all human person-selves. All mental abilities are not all found in all people. All mental abilities are not developed to the same extent in each person.

Some people can sing well while most of us can't carry a tune (singing is more a mental than physical ability). We can hear in-tune or out-of-tune singing without being able to sing in-tune ourselves. Some people can reason quite well while most of us struggle. There is not only one kind of reasoning but several kinds. People vary in their abilities to reason; some people can reason well about mechanical things but not about the law while some people can reason well about the law but not about finance. Some people have fashion sense while others don't, and the degree of fashion sense varies by individual. The degree of fashion sense varies within the same individual even about different styles; some people can pick a shirt but not shoes. Some people easily figure out what a rabbit will do, or where to find wild berries, while most of us are happy to tag along with the clever ones. Having fashion sense, the ability to sing a tune, the ability to appreciate a painting, the ability to hunt, the ability to shop, and the ability to do math and science, do not all come together.

Here is not the place to decide if distinct mental traits, so much variability in distinct mental traits, so much coming together of distinct mental traits, or so much separation, supports the idea that nearly all humans are single whole person-selves, or undercuts that idea.

Rather, the points are: (1) There is a real issue. There is space to argue on these grounds. We cannot assume that all variation is merely part of the charm of being individuals. We cannot assume that we are whole single person-selves just because we want to be. (2) We have to think in terms of (a) separate mental traits, (b) variation in mental traits, and (c) how traits do or don't come together. (3) Then we have to decide if our assessment supports or denies the idea that humans are each whole single person-selves or are merely accidental grab bags of distinct traits.

-Humans share mental abilities with animals. I don't go into what those are.

People also have abilities that (we think) are found only with humans, such as the abilities to speak well, make art, and appreciate art. For this issue of the whole person-self, of course we should focus on the abilities that make humans distinct.

Still, important mental traits that we share with animals are distinct, vary, and do not come together reliably. That result leads us to doubt humans are simple whole single person-selves. If our underlying animal nature is made of a lot of distinct parts, the parts vary a lot, and the distinct variable parts do not always come together consistently, then it does not make sense to think we can build a single whole human person-self on that shifting sand.

Again, here is not the place to go into the issue. I am not saying this observation undercuts or supports the idea that all people are single whole person-selves. I am only saying there is an issue, even with the important traits that we share with animals. We do have to think about even our animal mental traits if we are honest in assessing people as whole single person-selves or as fragmented grab bags.

-Some people have a hard time thinking of mental abilities as traits. People more easily think of physical abilities as traits such as hair color and fingers made for grasping. It can help to think out this issue (distinct traits, variation, and not coming in a whole coherent set) first in terms of physical abilities found only among some animals, then with physical abilities that humans share with animals, and then with physical abilities that are human only (such as full upright posture, full upright posture on two legs, ability

to run distances on two legs, and full precision grip). Then extend the insights from physical traits onto mental traits. I will try to put on the Internet an essay that walks people through from physical traits to mental traits, and the issues.

-It was useful in our evolutionary past to think of the self as the center of intentions and it is still useful to think of whole single person-selves in this way, both our self and other selves. Really what matters are the distinct intentions, not any supposed center location where intentions live and out of which intentions come. We can see intentions (or their effects) but we do not easily see the center. Intentions are often distinct. We can have distinct intentions even without a central place from which they spring. The fact that we think of intentions as unified does make them unified and, in contrast, leads us to suspect that they are not unified. We over compensate with the idea of unification to make up for a distinct lack of unity.

-The idea of a unified single self need not be entirely true to be more useful than harmful. We can hold to the idea of a unified self even if the idea is not entirely true. We can repress questioning the unity of the self if questioning undermines an otherwise useful idea. If questioning the unity of the self leads us to treat other people in ways that hurt our success, such as by leading us to be nasty to neighbors, then we have to stop thinking that way. If questioning the unity of the self leads us to doubt the soul, to doubt the mainstream religion of our group, and so hurts our success, then we should repress such thinking. On the other hands, as scientists, we need to (temporarily) rise above this evolutionary limit. We should not think about the unity of the self as a metaphysical given but as an evolved idea with strategic benefits. Whether it is true or not is another issue. When not thinking as scientists, we think it is true because it is useful and because we evolved to think it is true. Thinking of the self as a soul is one way to use the idea of a self usefully and to prevent undermining the idea. Still, as scientists, we do have to get over evolved biases sometimes.

-Running every idea through a unified self before acting can take a lot of time and energy, and sometimes we can't afford the time or energy. It is better to have specific mechanisms for specific situations, and to set those off when the need arises. This is one reason why we see the world as lively. When hiking, if we see a snake, it is better to stop in our tracks and to slowly go backward. If we have to think about this situation, and process it through our gigantic brain, then we would die too often. If something sticks in our throat, we spit it out without thinking. We can see these mechanisms at work even when the situation now is not exactly like what the mechanism originally evolved to serve, as when parents stick their arms in front of children when parents brake the car.

-To make the absolute best decision often requires much information. Sometimes we don't have as much as we would like but we have to act anyway. After a certain age, it just comes time to either get married or settle down to single life. Most of us decide to get married even though we don't know nearly as much as we should. Most of us know far less about our spouse than we should, especially in the modern world where everyone knows everyone else for generations. Even with the Internet and dating services, we don't know enough. But we "take the leap" and get married anyway. Almost the definition of a good entrepreneur is being able to make good guesses on limited information. You can't sit on a pile of money forever and you can't let great chances keep passing by. Sooner or later, we have to leap for a business venture not unlike we used to leap to catch rabbits. We have evolved mechanisms to deal with less-than-perfect-and-needed information but it is not useful to describe them here. They support the point.

-A lot of the information that we get is not certain in the sense of “the sun will rise tomorrow” but likely in the sense of “probably it will rain lightly tomorrow” or “probably that red car will stop at the stop sign by where the children are playing”. Probable information is like incomplete information so that I don’t go into the difference. The point is that we have to act and we have to do it in ways that are peculiar to this kind of situation. The way we act in this situation is under the control of different methods (mechanisms) of deciding than how we decide whether to wear the green shirt or the blue.

-We can’t think of, assess, and decide a lot of stuff or we would go crazy (breathing, chewing, digesting, beating of our hearts, etc.). While it might not seem exactly the same, thinking is not really all that different from just doing bodily acts. We have to do a lot of our thinking in a similar manner such as going through a yellow light or stopping, buying red apples or green apples, wearing a light coat or a medium coat, using this word or that, etc. You just have to make up your mind fairly soon.

-Some acts, ideas, attitudes, etc. seem to “get our goat” and we act on them “without thinking” such as someone cheating at cards, election fraud, idiots making loud noise coming out of their cars. We feel the same way but in the different direction for good acts such as one child sharing with another or a politician telling the plain honest truth.

-Morality does involve judgments and facts but morality does not involve judgments and facts such as in the issue “are extra large eggs worth the price increase over large eggs?” Morality involves decisions about the quality of acts and ideas, decisions that do not necessarily rest on pure information of any kind. Suppose two people argue and then one hits the other (I recall pictures of brawls at speeches of Donald Trump). We can argue whether there was sufficient provocation but the decision does not come down to knowing exact words and exact tone. The decision comes down to what we consider provocation and how much is sufficient to do what. That is a different kind of assessment than considering the price of eggs, and requires a different kind of thinking. It might require different pathways in the brain.

-Emotions often commit us to a way of acting rapidly and even when we do not have all the information that we might like. When animals are familiar with the emotions typical of a species, then emotions help the animal to know what this animal is likely to do regardless of the first animal might assess the situation, and so the first animal can respond appropriately. As people, we know the stock of emotions typical of people, and that helps us know what will happen if somebody slaps somebody even in a mall. When we learn the emotions typical of dogs, we know what will happen when a strange child wanders too near the dog bowl at feeding time.

-Contrary to how people tend to think of “emotion” when they think in terms of “logic versus emotion”, emotions are not all one thing and they might be about as distinct from each other as love is from geometry. Emotions are a bundle of jumps.

-When we have fungus on our toes, doctors give us an anti-fungal cream to apply directly to our toes. Doctors don’t treat our souls. Doctors cut out specific parts of our body that have cancer. Doctors give us chemotherapy for cancer.

-I mentioned in Part 3 above that we sometimes misperceive the world because a misperception is more useful than accuracy. Many features that I described just above are variations on this theme. One of the most important variations is that we see the world as more lively than it is. We see more intention than is really there. We see intention where really there is none. We see more meaning than is really there. We see meaning where there is none. Almost all of us think more of ourselves than we should. Some of us think too little of ourselves, leading to sadness. Most of us over-value our spouses, and that is a good thing. Without all this mis-thinking, the worlds of opera and soap opera would not be possible.

-We deceive ourselves, usually so we can deceive other people. Every time we deceive ourselves, we fragment ourselves. We make little compartments where the real truth has to be locked away to protect us. We don't put all suppressed truths in the same compartment, and usually we have to keep one suppressed truth from knowing about the others, so we can have many dozens of little mental "cysts". Each mental cyst is potentially another self in our total bundle. Usually, sane people can handle the fragmentation. Sometimes we get lost and lose our sense of self. Nobody is immune to this breaking of the self due to self deception.

The fragmented self is not the bad horrible creature that Tom Riddle makes of himself when he breaks himself into pieces (horcruxes) so as to become Voldemort, but, then neither is it the simple good soul we wish we were.

On the other hand, consider these images that make us reconsider the place of independent modules in the construction of persons:

-When confronted with something like an angry dog, we have to either fight or run, right away. We cannot hesitate. There is no intermediate solution. The "flight versus flight" mechanism is a "module" that makes us do one or the other right away. But the module does not, and cannot, stand alone.

Your family, including your children, goes camping in the deep woods with another family including their children. You have bologna sandwiches for lunch. Some bear cubs happen to be nearby, and wander into camp looking for the source of the meat smell. Of course the children think they are cute. Their mother follows them into camp, see all you foreigners near her cubs, and gets really angry. You have to act quickly. Who do you save? Do you run away to save yourself regardless of your children? Do you save all your children but not the children of the other family? What if you can only save some of your children? Which do you save? Do you save your favorite? If you can, do you try to save all the children from both families? I won't tell you how natural selection might solve this problem.

-We can control our emotion with logic, other emotions, or through faith. We can control our emotions with practice.

-A friend steals some money from your purse. You discover the theft and guess who did it. But before you can do anything, the friend tells you about stealing and pays back the money. You should, can, and do put this in a greater context and evaluate a whole person.

-People who meditate, such as some yogis (including female yogis called "yoginis") can control bodily functions to some extent such as by breathing very slowly or changing their heart rate.

-Even ordinary people can control some usually automatic processes such as the need to sneeze or to gag.

-Doctors have known for a long time of the relation between will to live and ability to heal, attitude and recover, a relation between mind and body. The mind and body are one. If we neglect the mind, too often we cannot heal the body alone. If we damage the body, usually we damage the mind. Soldiers cannot be treated for PTSD or other problems if we ignore these links.

It seems as if there is a higher level of control that can sort out when to trigger a module or not. When two modules might need to be triggered nearly at once but are incompatible, the higher level of control can decide which module to trigger. This higher level of control is not likely a similar module itself such as "fight or flight" or "get really angry at cheating friends".

Does the possibility of some high level centralized control mean that we really are one unified self with a soul after all? No. It means we have to think through the issues carefully but we still should not jump to any conclusions, especially to support our views of religion, morality, or science.

### **Integrated Person.**

I value integrity in people. I do not define what integrity is. Most religions also value integrity, and think that integrity goes along with being a good person and-or an adept person, in religious views. Think of integrity as lack of contradictions. Contradictions undermine integrity, make us feel bad as a person, and make us act worse. Each lie, theft, cheat, or missed promise is a contradiction and it eats away at us. While usually we do not reach the level of Voldemort or the Emperor Darth Sidious, on a smaller scale, each contradiction is like Tom Riddle creating another horcrux and so becoming Voldemort.

Ideally, we would like to be completely free of contradiction. Ideally, we would like all parts of ourselves to know what all other parts are up to, and harmonize the parts. We do want the right hand to know what the left hand is doing.

While there seems to be a high level of control in humans, that high level likely does not lead to smooth total integration.

Do these facts mean I can never be fully integrated? Does the fact that I can never be fully integrated mean I can never achieve enough religious success? Is the simple truthful life of Christian, Taoist, or Zen hopes completely out of the question?

I think the realities of how people evolved do mean that we can never be fully integrated. We will always have conflicts in us. We will always be somewhat the slave to our modules, and we never can be fully in control. We can never live totally without self-deception. We always hide some truths. We can never see the world simply as it is, and so can never see ourselves simply as we are. Very few people learn to speak simply from a clean whole helpful heart. Just as we are always morally mixed, so we are always never simply whole persons. We can increase our integration, can diminish our contradictions, just as we increase our moral level, but we can never achieve full integrity.

The failure to achieve full integrity does not mean we are doomed to religious failure any more than the failure to be morally perfect means we are doomed to religious failure. Whether we are deep down really one or are a fragmented bundle is not our problem; it is God's issue. We don't have to worry about not being able to control our "flight or fight" response, our gag reflex, or all of our jealousy. We can control what we need to control to improve and to achieve religious success. We can control our tendencies to blurt out whatever little lie gets us out of a tight spot and, instead, try to tell the truth even when it hurts. We can stop stealing even when we won't get caught. What can control what we need to control to see the world in terms of God's love and to work hard to make a better world. We don't have to tell our wife that she looks fat in that dress or tell our husband that he is not going bald. We don't have to tell the boss that he-she sucks at golf and fantasy sports. We do have to accept when the candidate of our political party is not the best. Some people are more unified, honest, and simpler. We can imitate them. We can achieve their high level of integrity. We can achieve a pretty high level of integrity. That level is enough to get us on the right path and keep us there even if it is not the goal itself. You can still be good even if you are not wholly and totally good.

If you believe that some great religious heroes such as Jesus or Taoist adepts were without any internal conflict or contradiction, saw the world exactly as it is, saw themselves exactly as they are, and never hid away any truths, then I do not argue with you; but I don't agree with you. For example, Mohammad, in the Koran, lied to himself about cattle; and Jesus likely lied to himself about his mother getting "knocked up" before she was married. Rather than defend the view that your favorite hero was totally honest and totally integrated, it is more useful to think what it means that religious inspiration comes from imperfect fragmented persons. I find that insight more inspirational than the idea of perfect persons.

#### **PART 6: Optional: More Implications.**

All the ideas in this Part of the chapter are my own. They are not necessary implications of the fact that human nature evolved. You could believe human nature evolved but not agree with my ideas. Still, they are reasonable implications of the fact that human nature evolved.

#### **God Exists or Not Exists.**

The fact that we evolved the ability to imagine God does not mean that God exists or God does not exist. The evolution of the ability for the idea of God, the fact that the idea came to us through evolution, is not relevant to the truth or value of the idea. We evolved the ability to imagine tigers and elephants; whether they are real depends on grounds other than our evolved ability to imagine them. We evolved the ability to imagine cloud-beings on giant gas planets. We might never be able to assess whether they are real by going to look. So we have to judge whether they are likely real or not by criteria other than direct view. We evolved the ability to imagine unicorns but used our other evolved abilities, our evolved abilities to think, to decide that unicorns are not real in the same way we can use our evolved abilities to assess the likelihood of life on giant gas planets. Likewise, we have to judge the issue of God on other grounds than whether we evolve the ability to imagine God. If you are quite careful, you can admit the fact that the basis for an idea evolved into the grounds for assessing the idea; but, until you learn to be quite careful, it is best to forget about evolution, pro or con, while thinking out God and morality.

Every particular kind of God entails also a particular kind of morality. The morality of Jesus and the idea of God-as-a-mind-and-person-and-the-Judeo-Christian-Muslim-God go along. I don't go into this aspect of the issue here.

Neither logic nor evidence can conclusively prove that God exists or does not exist, not logic or evidence from evolution or anywhere else.

So we have to rely on judgment and have to be open about what we do. We can decide if the evidence supports more the idea that there is some God or supports more the idea that there no God at all. If we think the evidence supports some God, (1) we can start from the evidence to think about what God the evidence supports, or (2) we can start from a particular God to think if the evidence supports that God. Most people take their God from childhood, and use whatever evidence and logic they can to support the claim that their God is the one-and-only-God and their way of life the best. Some people take a God or take a philosophical idea to which they have converted, and then search the evidence for justification; that is what atheists do. There is nothing absolutely wrong with doing this as long as you know what you are doing and you don't hide it from others. Just as no evidence or logic can conclusively prove God or not God, none can conclusively prove one God or one way, and we still have to use judgment.

Not surprisingly, on this basis, I think the evidence supports the idea that there is a mind behind it all, that mind is like a person, that personal mind is God, this God is like the Judeo-Christian-Muslim God, and the way of life that God supports is the teachings of Jesus mixed with practicality and Western values. God welcomes good ideas from other traditions. I do not go into the issue more here. I go into it some more in the chapter on atheism, but I don't finally settle it. Most of this book supports my judgment in one way or another.

### **Frequent Theme: Evolved Sentience and Evolved Morality.**

When sentience and the capacity for morality evolve, they have to evolve together. Any evolved sentient being (person, agent) has to have moral feelings, and those moral feelings have to be similar to the moral feelings that humans have. Any being that evolved morality also has to be sentient, and the sentience would be similar to the sentience of humans. When you think of evolved sentient being, always think of sentient-moral being; and when you think of evolved moral being always think of moral-sentient being. Sometimes I write "sentient-moral" to make this point but even when I write only "sentient" or "moral" always think of "sentient-moral".

Evolved morality has to be along the lines we know of as morality. Morality has a logic, and evolution has to follow that logic, at least mostly. Evolved morality has to be based on the logic of the Golden Rule and "applies equally". See above for details of these ideas. Once we have this base, of course, we can twist it to serve our self-interest; but we must begin with this base. If we stray far from this base, other people will "call us" on our diversion, and we have to return. When we return, we return to this base.

An evolved sentient-moral being could create artificial beings who are sentient but do not have morality, or who have a sense of morality different than the morality we humans evolved with. An evolved sentient-moral being could create artificial beings who are moral but not sentient. An evolved sentient-moral being could create artificial beings who are sentient but have sentience different than human sentience. We

evolved humans likely are doing that right now with computers. All the possibilities will come with genetic engineering and bio-technology. None of this detracts from the facts that (1) when sentience and morality evolve, they evolve together, and that (2) all evolved morality has to follow much the same logical lines as the Golden Rule and “applies equally”.

The universe is mechanical and amoral. Yet it generates sentient-moral beings and generates many situations-and-things that are complicated and interesting such as galaxies, storms, forests, tribes of people, farms, fire flies, cities, democracies, Baroque music, chick flicks, and crime novels. The world gives sentient-moral beings a lot to do. It is a dangerous place but also one full of opportunity. I believe God planned the universe to be all this. He gave sentient-moral beings an arena in which to wonder and to work things out.

I do not say the world is a fantasy playground and we all should be “at play in the fields of the Lord”. The world can be a hard place too, and it is often a painful boring grind. The sentient-moral beings on planet Earth might not do well but instead might turn this place into a poison pit. Even if most of us do well and have fun, a lot of us get beat up too much to succeed. God knows all this. I am not sure what he makes of it and what he will do with beat up people. These facts do not change that something fascinating arose out of the mechanical and amoral, we can work on what arose, and we can often enjoy ourselves as we work on it.

### **God, through Evolution, Gave Us Almost Enough.**

God, through evolution, gave us considerable abilities. Evolution gave us enough abilities so that we can properly assess most situations if we prepare ourselves and put our minds to it. We know how to make a living even if we cannot succeed grandly. We know right from wrong, and can do the right thing if we are willing to take the “hit” to our practical success. We know when we use morality to serve other ends, and we know we should not. We know when people use us for their own ends, and we usually go along with it because it serves our own (bad) ends or because we “get off on it” such as by feeling righteous. We know how to be good neighbors and good citizens. We know how to make the world better and more interesting without also making it worse and scarier.

God did not give us enough abilities so we can do everything proper preparation. We cannot be good citizens unless we are lucky enough to be born into a country with good institutions or we are very brave. We cannot be good citizens, good neighbors, good friends, or good parents, unless we put work into it. We have to be informed, listen to other people, and practice making good decisions. Most of us don’t do that but rather spend our energy getting off on giving our ignorant opinions.

God did not give us the abilities to overcome all obstacles. Sometimes we run into something that we just cannot handle, such as disease, natural disaster, terrorist attack, home invasion, long-term abuse, chronic depression, or a bad boss. God did give us the sense to get help sometimes. Sometimes we just suffer through it. Don’t look down on people who really can’t handle situations, as long as they are not “faking it” as part of the culture of victimization.

Most situations in the modern world are not much more complicated than situations ever were in human history but some are. It is hard to figure out what to do about terrorism; unemployment; welfare; inflation;

illegal immigration; bad education; ethnic groups, religious groups, socio-economic classes, and other subgroups with bad attitudes; and general rudeness. But that is part of being a citizen in a modern state, and we have to put up with the bad to get the good; we have to put up with the duties to get the benefits. Do what you can with what you've got. Get advice from somebody who makes real sense, not from some political demagogue who panders to your self-interest and prejudices. If you can't figure it out properly, then don't do anything. If you can't elect a person who clearly has good sense, then don't elect anybody.

Individual people differ in almost all details of their physical appearance. In the same way, people differ in the details of their abilities. Some people are better at music while others are better at business. Some people are better at cooking while others are better at hunting. People are able in different ways and they are unable in different ways. People differ in their able-ness and un-able-ness. This does not mean we are generally all-able or all-un-able. It means we can expect to be generally able for most situations that people usually had to face, at least before the invention of agriculture and civilization, but we are able in different individual ways. We can rely on what we have for most of the situations in life even if we do it a bit differently than other people, and even if we are better in some ways and worse than others.

The facts that people were generally able for most of life's situations, at least until the rise of agriculture and civilization, and that individuals differ, figure in later chapters in discussions of Buddhism, Taoism, and Zen. These facts matter for the teachings of Jesus because they support the idea that we should be tolerant and accept individuals. Individual differences are usually as source of pleasure.

### **Mixed Moral Nature Again.**

Nearly all people have a firm moral sense. We know good from bad, right from wrong, and should from should not. We know the difference between being pro-active versus waiting for the world to take care of itself and take care of us.

Our moral sense is not perfect. We make mistakes. Moral ambiguity is real, and we get confused. We can get fooled by well-meaning parents, bad-meaning politicians, televangelists, self-righteous indignant people, smug do-gooders, people who use ambiguity to excuse what they want, modern Romanticism, greed, the smug moral superiority that prevails among college students, and all manner of non-academic slimy persuaders. The fact that we make mistakes is why we have moral sense; if we did what was right automatically then we would not need much moral sense any more than we need a well-developed sense of air to breathe. The fact that we make mistakes does not mean we do not have a firm sense of morality, it only means the world is a difficult place.

Again, we have a firm enough sense of morality for nearly all situations, especially if we talk to people without losing our natural bearings.

At the same time, it is worth stressing that nearly all of us have a mixed moral nature. We evolved both to act well most of the time and to cheat too often. We evolved to do out-and-out bad some of the time such as by stealing, hitting, and lying hurtful gossip, although, thankfully, we do that rarely, and only few among us learn to be criminals as a way of life. Usually we are good; we can shape behavior through teaching and learning; and we can learn to be even better than our nature by birth, if not perfect. When we "go

bad” consistently, usually we learned to do it. What can be learned could have been avoided, and might be reversible.

We have to accept the badness in ourselves without romanticizing it, liking it, dwelling in it, wallowing in it, indulging it, enjoying it too much, or using it for selfishness and further badness. We have to deal with the badness in ourselves without thinking we can become perfectly good. We can be naughty without being too bad, and we can make up for it if we really hurt somebody. We can learn to channel bad energy into getting things done without becoming annoying do-gooders.

How we turn out depends on culture, social group, government, institutions, and personal history. It is worth striving to mold the kind of social group etc. that leads people to be good, supports other people being good, and results in mutual support of goodness. It is worth striving for democratic institutions. While we cannot change our personal historical past we can change the trajectory of our lives, and it is worth striving to do that.

We cannot make people thoroughly good through moral, religious, social, political, or politically correct harangue. We cannot make people thoroughly good by threatening them with hell, through religious revivals, or through scolding and gossip. We cannot make people thoroughly good through a lot of fussy laws. Usually we make them worse. We can control their behavior through horrible tight institutions such as in Fascism and Totalitarianism; but that is worse than the usual amount of bad behavior. Any politician or preacher who offers a plan to make people really good usually is offering a plan for one social group to control the state and to dominate other social groups.

Conditions can drive people toward badness. Poverty is one such situation but so is protecting privilege and wealth. Living in a bad corrupt state usually makes people bad and corrupt. Living in a place where people have not sense of community and general good usually makes people selfish. Once in a situation of badness, then badness can foster more badness and other badness, and so support itself. Badness can become endemic.

There really are societies of badness and cultures of badness. There really are subgroups in modern societies that have been overrun by badness, sometimes ethnic groups, and sometimes occupational groups. I feel sorry for the innocent children that are born into bad situations. If our particular culture or social group supports bad attitudes, we have to accept that about our culture, and then change it or leave it. Once situations “go bad”, it is hard to correct them from the inside. Usually bad situations have to be corrected when good people interfere from the outside, and keep interfering for a long time, as when the federal government steps in to “clean up” a city gone bad.

In nearly all groups, there will be mostly good people but there will also be a few bad people. Some bad people are bad by nature and there is little we can do about them. Some bad people learned to be bad, and might not have been bad by nature under other circumstances. But they did turn bad, and there is little we can do practically now to help them. We cannot eliminate bad people by harangue or crusade. The presence of some bad people does not mean morality has failed or religion has failed. It does mean we have to be sensible and we have to protect ourselves, our family, and group from bad people. We try to protect ourselves against bad people without becoming paranoid and without ruining life for good people too. We have to have good social pressure, laws, and enforcement.

Sometimes bad groups use state programs to live off the state. Such bad groups include: some people in business firms, financiers, poor people, occupational groups such as some teachers, and even ethnic groups. We can use our good nature to see the good aspects of the people within these groups, but we have to protect ourselves from these groups too.

People naturally divide up into groups of “us” and “them”. We tend to be suspicious of them, and we tend to see their normal life in a bad light. They do the same with us. In this case, we have to work against evolved nature. We have to try to overcome the natural tendency toward suspicious relations among groups. We have to try to see them as if they were human like us. We do not always succeed, but we can try.

### **All Kinds of People.**

As any large group will contain various moral personalities, and all of us have a mix of moral tendencies in us, so any large group will contain various kinds of people, and most of us have the potential to be several kinds of people. Groups contain heroes, bullies, musicians, soldiers, healers, priests, leaders, followers, potters, skilled hunters, skilled gatherers, patient people, impatient people, good parents, bad parents, good citizens, bad citizens, brave people, cowards, gossips, truth tellers, etc. I have no idea which of these types is more “natural” or less “natural”, and I don’t care here. The point is that we are bound to deal with a variety of people, we cannot make everybody the same, and we should not try hard to do so. The fact of human variety has good points and bad points. On the good side, we have a lot of interesting variety. On the bad side, we have some crappy people, and we always have social pressure for conformity. It is better to accept variety as long as a type does little harm. Accept silly people as long as you do not also accept criminals. You have to work out your own lessons and your own balances.

### **Almost Good Enough for Democracy and the Planet.**

I repeat what I said at the beginning. People are mostly good morally and are astute politically but people are not good enough and adept enough to make a simple populist democracy succeed. We are not good enough or adept enough to steward the planet properly. The goodness, and political skills, of the average person can be increased by the right institutions but they cannot be increased enough to make simple populist democracy successful. Alternatives exist in which we might be generally good and adept enough but we don’t have those, and so there is no point in speculating. Even if we had alternatives now, I think it is already too late. We have already dug a hole too big. Even so, we should not stop training people to be good neighbors. Even when the world declines, we will still have neighbors.

Through evolution, God made us good enough and adept enough to create agriculture, industry, and populist democracy but he did not make us good enough to make them work well. I don’t know why. I don’t know if God, through evolution, could have made us more adept or less adept and still made us sentient-moral-aesthetic beings. I don’t know if God could have made us good enough and adept enough but did not. I don’t know if, on some other planets, evolved beings are good enough and adept enough to succeed well - but I hope so. It is easy to make metaphysical dramas out of all this but I refuse. It is better to accept the situation and to figure out what we personally, and in concert with other like-minded people, can do to make things better.

### **Magic and Superstition are Natural.**

See Part 2. My religious stance is austere and uncommon. Because our capacity for religion evolved, most religion includes a big dose of what I call magic and superstition: saviors, ghosts, spirits, visitations, power, the Force, Jedi, Sith, angels, saints, demons, medallions, curses, witches, etc. I do not dwell on that here. I have seen enough superstition of various kinds on various levels – including academic ideology that is pretty much just magic - so that I have come to dislike it. I point out some of the magic and superstition in later chapters on common popular religion and on mistakes in religion.

Magic and superstition are not necessarily bad. They are part of evolved human imagination, and most imagination is good. We should not try to squash imagination, and so we should not try to eliminate all this “mumbo jumbo” stuff from religion. Without imagination we would not have science or art, so magic and superstition are part of the price we pay for better things.

This irrational “stuff” can be bad in two ways. First, it blocks appreciation for a clearer better view of reality – in other words, it blocks appreciation for my view. Second, it leads to bad behavior more often than to good behavior. Even so, the bad behavior is mostly annoying rather than really bad. The harm done from trying to block magic and superstition usually is worse than tolerating them a little. More harm is done by zealots crusading on staunch religious principles that allow only a minimum of magic, such as in Protestantism, Islam, and atheism, than is done by people burning incense to ask the saints for a good score on an exam or for a negative on a pregnancy test. When magic and superstition lead to really bad results, then we have to take up intellectual arms against them.

It is sad to see an intelligent person lapse into magic and superstition. Most of my academic friends felt that sadness when they found out I believed in God and prophets. The greatest scientist of all time, Isaac Newton, wasted a third of his life looking for a nonexistent code in the Bible that hid the timetable for the world and its end. People have a right to be both stupid and smart. Rather than try to save all potentially clear-thinking children negatively by squashing magic and superstition in everybody, it is better positively to promote good thinking so people who have the ability for clear thinking have something to come to and can feel proud of using good judgment. That is pretty much what we do now, but we could do a better job. People who believe in a reasonable religious position, and who follow science, should be more open about what they believe.

I am not sure if my religious stance is an aberration when put in the context of evolved human nature. It does seem a little odd that humans in general evolved to accept spirits and forces, and that most people actively believe in magic and superstition, but that a small group of people does not. I don't know if the people who do not dwell in magic and superstition are stunted or advanced. Most people are about five feet to six feet (160 centimeters to 200 centimeters) tall but some people are only four feet tall and some people are over six feet six inches tall. If my view is an aberration, if reasonable religion is an aberration, then maybe I should feel bad about promoting it; but I don't. I feel good about it.

I don't know how evolution gave rise to people having a range of predilections for making something out of our lively world. I don't know if people show a continuous range or if we fall into types such as natural

skeptic, natural moderate believer, and natural spiritualist. This is a good topic for future research in the evolution of human nature.

### **Natural and Good.**

Paraphrase of remarks after Darth Sidious got Annikin Skywalker to murder Count Dookoo:

A: I shouldn't have done that; it's not the Jedi way.

DS: It's only natural. He cut off your hand so you cut off his head. You wanted revenge. Remember what you did to the sand people.

See "The Tempest" by William Shakespeare.

In this section, I do not distinguish between "good" as a moral term and "good" meaning "beneficial" or as a general term of approval. Mostly I use it "good" to mean morally good. Take "natural" however you wish. In this case, in most common views, it does not include evolution and natural selection.

We like to think what is good is natural and what is natural is good. That is often true, but not always. When goodness and natural are not the same, we have to choose. Evolution gave us the abilities to see goodness and naturalness, even if not always clearly, and to choose, even if not always adeptly.

Most of the time, in most places, people have not drawn a sharp line between good versus natural unless situations forced them. People want to merge goodness with what comes naturally and with the natural world around them. Most of the time, we can do this, but not always.

Since about 1600, about when Shakespeare wrote "The Tempest", for reasons I don't go into, nature (natural; including the ecology and the planet), good, human-made things (art and artificiality including machines and science), and ordered human social life (including economy and state) have not always gone together well. When Westerners have not been able gracefully to align natural and good, we have tended to favor natural over good, and to denigrate everything civilized as un-natural, perverted, artificial, good only in a false way, harmful, and bad. Everything natural is honest and beneficial regardless of its apparent moral goodness or badness; everything that is truly beneficial must be from nature ultimately. Although modern people live in this well-intended hopeful view, this view is wrong. Nature is not always good. What is good is not always natural.

For example: It is good to give to charities so charities can give to needy people, even people we don't know, likely will never know, and can never give back to us. It is good to tell the truth even when lying might help us. It is good not to steal even when we would not get caught. It is good to treat other people as we would like them to treat us. It is good to frame all big rules as if they applied to everyone equally. But none of these is natural. It is natural to lie, cheat, steal, cheat on spouses, force other people to our will, and sometimes to murder, especially when we would benefit a lot and would not get caught. But it is not good. Formal schooling with thirty children to a room is not natural but, most of the time, it is good. It is natural for a 20-year-old boy to go out with a 15-year-old girl but usually in modern life it is not good. It is natural when an experienced 15-year-old girl seduces an inexperienced 19-year-old boy, but usually it

is not good. It can be natural for a 30-year-old man to take a 15-year-old girl “under his wing” to teach her about sex and life. In some situations, it might be good; see the movie “Gigi” and read “Emma” by Jane Austen where the heroine is 14 and the hero is 40. In our world, we think it is bad, and usually it is. It can be natural for a 30-year-old woman to tutor a 15-year-boy in sex, love, and life; but teachers go to jail for doing that; see Adam Sandler’s “That’s My Boy”. Birth control is not natural but usually is good. People like to think any plant is entirely-and-only beneficial and good but that is not true. Poison oak and ivy are natural, and are bad. Apple seeds and peach pits have cyanide. Most herbal teas have little benefit, and, if they do, the benefit is from chemicals that could be reproduced by a drug company. Sometimes, but not too often to worry about, herbal teas are harmful. “Natural” and “organic” foods cost a lot of money for whatever benefit they might give. Childhood cancer usually is quite natural but it is evil.

Although we can’t fall back on “natural” as a sure guide, we also can’t fall back on morality, even when we overcome obvious mere convention and contrived ideologies. We have to be careful putting good over natural. When put as a simple choice between natural and good, it seems obvious that we must choose good. To some people, choosing good over natural is the definition of morality. They denigrate natural and raise moral – they glut on the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The choice between natural and good is not so clear. We can see they are wrong without falling into silly moral relativism. Religious leaders say it is better to die than to return violence for badness but nearly all of us choose to fight for our families rather than let them suffer. Our choice is natural, and, over time, this choice led to great good. Jesus said people have to give up family, wealth, and most comfort so as to follow him. Almost no supposedly-ardent Christians that I know do this. Almost nobody can do it, and I think Jesus knew so. We really don’t want to put in jail the young single parent who steals food for his-her children. Much harm is done by dogma that leads people to seek supposed good over natural, such as suicide bombing, killing doctors who do abortions, and living off the state. When a 14-year old girl seduces a 15-year old boy, the boy goes to jail but the girl does not. Sometimes even dogma that is supposed to support natural leads to harm, as when religions reject birth control or reject homosexuality by saying wrongly that it is totally unnatural and so totally bad.

In the 2000s, we think of families as natural, perhaps the most natural, as very good, and as the best mix of natural and good. We want families, natural, good, and a good political state that lets us mix them. The dying words of Princess Padme (Amidala), as she gave birth, were that Anakin still had good in him, with the implication that Obiwan should seek it. The mix of good-and-family is how Luke saved Anakin and so also at one stroke how Luke overcame the evil state. Sadly, real life is not like this. Loving your family is a great idea but using the family to settle all issues of natural and good doesn’t work. I don’t explain or give examples. Shows such as “Married with Children”, “Animal Kingdom”, “Good Behavior”, “The Americans”, and “Empire” try to make sense of this problem.

So, still, sometimes we do have to choose between natural and good.

I do not settle this issue. I point it out because it affects how people think of evolution, nature, morality, good, and God. People with sense respect the issue of natural and good, and they take the time and effort to think it out. People that support natural over good don’t like that: natural is not all good; there is goodness apart from their view of natural; good sometimes trumps natural; much of what they see as natural is not natural; and much of their idea of natural is from ideologies and is not realistic or natural. I don’t know if they like the idea that the ability for good (morality) came from natural selection. People that

support morality (their view of good) over natural don't like that: our ability for good comes from nature; sometimes what is natural but not obviously good can lead to good in the long run; people who know well the difference between good and natural often do what is natural anyway; most ideas of good come from ideologies (dogma); and most dogma has ideas of good that are not natural and that people don't follow even if they staunchly support the religion. How little nature is too little in a modern society and on the planet Earth of the future? How much contrivance is too much contrivance? Does substituting worship of nature, morality, or society for worship of God really help? There are other bones of contention in the debate of good versus natural but there is no use going into them here. Don't fall into the traps. Accept that you have to choose sometimes, and find sound reasons for choices. Think about what "natural", "non-natural", "artificial", "contrived", "genuine", "good", "beneficial", and "bad" mean for you, other people, society, and the planet.

Most choices between good and natural are not very harmful, and usually natural versus good is not important. It can be important to choose a small ecologically-friendly car over a gas-guzzling monster SUV but it is not so important whether you choose a Toyota or a Ford. When we choose the unnatural brownie over the natural organic bitter tough wild carrot, the world does not end. Natural versus good only becomes an issue when it becomes an issue, as, for example, if I am too fat and should not eat the brownie at all or if I stupidly eat so many natural bitter carrots that I puke.

We have three problems in choosing between natural and good. First, there is no framework greater than both that tells us how to choose. Usually one or the other serves as our biggest framework and the basis for choice. In the distant past, natural selection automatically made choices for us but, in modern times, usually we have to make a conscious choice, and have to take a shot in the dark. Second, we rarely see natural or good plainly, simply, and in-themselves; if that is possible. We see them only through lenses. One set of lenses is ideologies, especially ideologies that people use to distort their own thinking and to manipulate others. A large part of what people in all parts of the world think about natural and artificial is itself artificial and it is not nearly true enough. It is fun and helpful to examine your ideas to see how much they are distorted ideologies. Third, to choose well, people have to think hard, and that task, too often, they will not do. They prefer to abuse "natural" and "good" as overly simplistic tools.

The ideas of religious teachers help overall, and usually are not too wacky. Most great teachers such as Mohammad, Jesus, the Buddha, Confucius, and even Chuang Tzu were sensible about choices between natural and good, and only sometimes stressed what is good but not natural or natural but not good.

The problem of good and natural holds many sub-problems. The problem requires more space than I can give here. I go into it elsewhere.

### **No Intrinsic Natural Meaning to Life.**

Natural selection is automatic. It has no intrinsic direction or goal. Nature does not aim at complexity, stability, interdependence, intelligence, cognitive ability, moral competence, or awareness of God even if nature does get there during evolution. In evolution, some individuals reproduce better than others in particular situations because they differ. The next generation is made up more from descendants of the individuals that reproduced better. What works in one situation does not necessarily work in another

situation. That's all. What works, works; what is, is; what reproduces, reproduces; what out-reproduces, out-reproduces; what comes to represent the species, comes to be the species.

Because there is no intrinsic better or best in the automatic process of natural selection, there can be no intrinsic meaning in the automatic process. There is no necessary meaning to evolution.

People evolved to find meaning even when there is no intrinsic meaning, just as we evolved to see the world as livelier than it is and to taste nutritious food as delicious. Seeing meaning where there is not necessarily meaning, seeing more meaning than there really is, and seeing meaning other than correct meaning, are all misperceptions that can help us in evolutionary success. How this works is a big field in itself, and not well understood, so I leave the topic alone here. I have been on the bad end of all these misperceptions, and so I have no doubt that they are a real part of evolved human nature.

People don't like that there is no intrinsic clear meaning in nature, evolution, and human nature. People evolved to find meaning, this is an important place where people expect to find meaning, and they find meaning whether it is there or not. The question is whether they find good modestly correct meaning. People think "natural" and "good" do coincide, should coincide, and have to coincide. People want to find a natural meaning to a good moral life, especially their own particular lives. People want to find meaning in life by doing natural things such as raising a family and outshining the neighbors. People want to find meaning in a successful life even if it is not entirely morally good. People want to find meaning in having a lot of experiences even of some are harrowing and some are morally bad. People who know something about evolution find intrinsic meaning in facets of evolution such as complexity, kinds of brain activity, and interdependence of parts. I sympathize with the need for meaning but there is still no necessary intrinsic basis for meaning in evolution or in nature.

I find the fact that there is no intrinsic meaning in evolution invigorating. I like imputing meaning to life. I don't mind that I impute meaning and I cannot logically prove meaning is "out there". I don't mind that I am not fully correct. I don't mind that imputing meaning is an evolved ability like finding nutritious food. I like acting morally most of the time, and I don't mind that my tendency to do so evolved. I don't expect to show that any meaning is necessary or intrinsic, although I do want to make good cases for the meaning that I impute. I expect to find out more after I die.

Because there is no necessary intrinsic meaning in nature alone, we have to accept variation in what people do find subjectively meaningful. People vary on what is meaningful, and we just have to accept that fact. That fact supports the ideas of plurality and interaction. The fact that we find a lot of overlap on what is meaningful gives me hope that we might be right about some of it even if we are not right about all of it.

Just because there is no necessary objective intrinsic meaning in nature alone, and people vary on what they find meaningful, does not mean there are no guidelines and standards. There are, especially in the teachings of the great religious teachers and scientists. We can't allow people to impute meaning that excuses badness. This book helps you discover the ideas of great religious teachers and to avoid the bad ideas.

**Enough or Not Enough.**

To me, it is more than enough that God set up the universe as an interesting place, in which life would evolve on many planets, and sentient life would evolve on enough planets. It is enough that people on Earth evolved a sense of morality and beauty, and that God sends us – I am not sure how – prophets to teach us how to be good people and live well. It is enough to act well according to the teachings of Jesus and other prophets without feeling that my idea system has to dominate. This is enough even though I know there is a good chance that human life on planet Earth will fail of its promise and fail in its duty to be stewards of the Earth. I don't need much magic or superstition.

For most people, this is not enough. People really need magic and superstition. Magic and superstition really are natural. People need to believe in many spirits. They need to believe they can have a personal relation with a mid-level spirit who will take care of them. They need to believe their ethnic-political group knows the "one true religion", and that a powerful spirit takes care of their ethnic-religious-political group. They need to believe that they each personally, their families, and their ethnic-religious-political group, will succeed regardless of what happens to Earth or to other people. They are susceptible to causes and they need to feel justified and saved. Even atheists and secularists need to feel religious-like fervor; they find their fervor in causes. They cannot live without causes to justify and save them. They transcend the superstitious magical religion of the masses so they can feel superior, justified, and saved.

Include secular fervor in magic and superstition. When people believe in magic and superstition yet also do little harm and act on the message of Jesus, that result seems fine. When people believe in magic and superstition but do little harm, even if they seldom act on the message of Jesus - the usual case - then I accept the situation. When people believe in magic and superstition, they are also susceptible to bad reasons, usually from bad people, and they use bad reasons to validate acting badly to get wealth, power, and sex. That I dislike. When people do evil on the basis of magic and superstition regardless of other causes such as desire for wealth and power, I dislike that too.

I differ from most people in that I believe in only one magical being, God, and I disbelieve in almost all magical acts. I am not superstitious. I can relate directly to God, and I think people should relate to no other supernatural being except God. Atheists and jaded academic pseudo-skeptics think that makes me no different from most superstitious people and does make me different from the. I disagree because, to me, they seem more like most people than they seem like me. I leave it to the reader to decide.

I don't know what to do. The best thing I know to do is what I have done in for myself and in this book: think as clearly as I can, explain as clearly as I can, and work for what I think is worthwhile.

### **Imitation and System.**

People evolved the tendency to imitate what other people are doing, especially when other people look successful. If men see a man with a successful family, men try to find similar work, wear similar clothes, eat similar food, drive a similar car, drink similar booze, and, most important, find a similar spouse. Women do the same for what matters to them.

When I was young, parents used to say "If your friends all jumped off a bridge, would you do it too?" as a way to get children to follow parental rules instead of imitating peers. Kids followed peers anyhow, but

not in everything. Most of us didn't jump off bridges, wear stupid clothes, or take bad drugs for too long. Evolution also gave us the sense to know when to stop imitating one person and to start imitating another person or to stop imitating entirely and to do something on our own.

In the same way that people evolved to want meaning, are evolved to make it, and are evolved to imitate, so people evolved to seek and accept system. Meaning is more meaningful if it is part of a system. The more comprehensive the system, the better it is. We want to know not only that God set up this world to make sentient moral beings but also that he did it on other worlds, and we want to know what that all means as part of a system. We want not only to follow the Golden Rule but to think it is part of a system of ethics and part of what God wants. We want to think that voting leads to a good political system and a good nation. We make a deal with a particular spirit because that particular spirit is powerful and we want to think our spirit is the biggest baddest in the spirit system. Imitation is how people get into a system and reinforce the system. You follow the religion of your parents, ethnic group, and nation.

Yet following a system is no more always reliable than imitating other people is always reliable. We have to assess the strengths and weaknesses, the goods and bads, and the successes and failures, of the system. If this particular system does not work well enough, we might try another system. If this spirit doesn't have enough "mojo" to give us what we want, we look for another spirit, or we look for a different system of "mojo" and spirits. If Buddhism does not work well enough, we might switch to Hinduism or Taoism. If no system works well, we might have to strike out on our own, and we might even have to live without a well-knit system.

The general system is what most people live in most of the time, most people imitate when they imitate other people, and most people sustain when they follow other people. Social scientists call it "culture", "social system", or "social organization". Most people follow the general system most of the time but make exceptions when it is in their interest and when doing what they want is not likely to get them in too much trouble. Most people don't steal except when a lot of money is at stake and they are not likely to get caught. Most people wear similar clothes to everybody else except when they like to wear t-shirts or Hawaiian shirts. Most people strike a balance between the general system, alternative systems, and their particular tastes.

Just as evolution gave us a solid foundation of abilities to live (at least before the rise of agriculture and civilization), so most people are able to live through following their own capacities without a well-knit tight system - even though we seek system. Just as evolution leads us to differ a bit in our abilities even though we are generally capable, evolution led us to differ a bit in how we accept systems, how we reject systems, and what we are like when we live apart from systems. The ability to do on our own, ability to live apart from systems, and the distinctions between individuals, all play a role in later chapters on Taoism and Zen. These features remind us of the respect for individuals in the teachings of Jesus. The power of system plays a role in later chapters on Buddhism and Hinduism.

Don't romanticize system or anti-system. Just because we need some system does not mean the bigger and tighter a system is, the better it is. Just because we evolved to be able to get along pretty well using our native abilities (including imitation), and we all differ a bit, does not mean rebellion against the system is heroic. System is not necessarily good or bad; staunch individualism is not necessarily good or bad.

We can get an idea of the best attitude toward both system and non-system not through any platitude that I can offer here but through the ideas that come up throughout the book.

### **Beyond Itself.**

In the great movie “The African Queen”, Katherine Hepburn says to Humphrey Bogart something like, “The purpose of nature is to rise above itself”. People are the part of nature that rises above itself. Her opinion applies both to “good versus natural” and to the idea that religion rises above the “mere physical finite” nature of individual evolved sentient beings.

Natural selection gave us the ability to look at the world both semi-objectively and with inspiration. Most of our intellect is used for practical evolutionary success right now, but some of our left-over intellect might give us a picture of the world that is not limited by a focus on evolutionary success. Accidentally, we might have evolved the ability to look beyond ourselves to a bigger world, even if we cannot live in the bigger world. We owe much of our progress in science to the ability to see beyond what is right in front of us regardless of practicality.

Before you get excited, recall that images of bigger more important worlds do not agree between people who see them and between major religions. So, if evolution did allow us to see beyond ourselves, the vision is not clear and reliable. The most common elements of those visions seem to be love, trust, joy, empathy, decency, “applies equally” and the Golden Rule.

Evolution might have given us the ability sometimes to see beyond ourselves but it did not give us the ability to sustain the vision, and, in fact, evolution made sure the ability is limited and short-term. In our evolutionary past, dreamers who spent a lot of time seeing beyond the obvious world of right now did not do as well in the everyday world of raising a family and playing politics, and so left fewer descendants. Dreamers stumble over tree roots even if their dreams are true. There might be lessons in the images of a better world beyond the obvious hassle-ridden world of daily life but there might also be lessons in the fact that we cannot live in that other better world while we are still here. There is an evolutionary value to glimpsing a greater truer world from time to time but there is great evolutionary detriment in living in that world for more than a few days at a time.

Imagine you are a smart dog who lives among people in a happy suburban neighborhood. The people take you for walks. The people take you to the countryside. You have dog friends. Sometimes you are allowed to roam alone. From your travels, you have learned where food comes from, and how organized the human world is.

One day you come to deeply appreciate that the human world is better than dog world. The dog world depends on the human world for food, protection, shelter, health, entertainment, and in many other ways you don't understand. You think how dogs might become like humans, but, in your heart, you know that could never happen. It is not just that dogs can't talk – human children think dogs can – but dogs can't think like humans and act like humans.

Humans on the grand stage of existence are like dogs on the smaller stage of the human world. The difference is that the better worlds we see come as much out of imagination as they come from any real

spiritual world that encompasses this real material world. There might be a better world within which this real world lives but I doubt we can see it clearly. At best, we can get a sense of a better world to work for in this real world by seeing how our sense of morality and decency leads us to see a better world, and how our imaginations make this world more interesting.

If you do see a bigger picture, if you have a “Grand Canyon” moment, if you come to realize correctly that human squabbles are so much spray raised by the wake of a giant ship, then go with that as much as you can. Almost always, that kind of experience leads people to better people and to live by the teachings of great religions teachers such as Jesus. Go with that. Spend your life enjoying the world and helping out. Don’t go with anything bad. Admire the simple good people who can live that life even if they never had the feeling you had.

### **Getting By on Incomplete Knowledge.**

It seems vexing that God would evolve people who have moral feelings and wonder what it is all about but who can’t settle on one explanation of what it is all about. It is as if God didn’t finish the job.

Imagine you did know what it was all about. Likely, you would get bored. Likely, you would stop acting with moral commitment because you would lose interest. Likely, life is more fun because we don’t know what it is all about. That idea does not excuse evil, but it is a start.

Whether we know what it is all about or not, we still have a pretty good idea how to act. We know the basic principles of how to act even if we argue about their application in particular cases. We know the Golden Rule and “applies equally”. We know of charity, rule of law, the value of the individual, freedom, social justice, schools, and decency. We did evolve to know the basic principles and we did build ideas and institutions based on that ability. So maybe God did finish the job for what is needed in this world. Wondering what it is all about is icing on the cake.

In the future, we might learn more of what it is all about and we might have different moral challenges. The world of artificial intelligence and bio-engineering will change what it means to be human and to be a person. Even so, the moral foundation that we lay in this world will determine what that world will be like. Even in that world, I doubt the creatures will know fully what it is all about, but I think they will have good ideas what they should do anyway.

### **The Natural Wisdom of Following Jesus.**

Morality evolved. It is part of our nature. We have an inborn tendency to act along the lines of “applies equally” and “do unto others”. Most of us are more good than bad. Most of us respond well to goodness. A few consistently good people can change a troubled neighborhood. We have a natural tendency to empathy, and so we tend to widen the circle of goodness. We naturally follow along the lines taught by the great religious teachers. Jesus taught this way as a way of life, and so we naturally tend to live as Jesus taught.

It is wise to go along with nature as long as nature is good. It is wise to go along with the teachings of great religious teachers. It is not necessarily stupid, blind, or idealistic. People that tell you to slow down,

pay attention to the quality of life, help out, and maybe volunteer, are not saying anything foolish unless they take it to extremes.

Don't make too much of this. Don't make great religious teachers, including Jesus, into gods, avatars of a cosmic principle, or living archetypes. They simply felt clearly and strongly that part of human nature that we have all been prepared to feel but usually suppress.

### **The Natural Folly of Following Jesus.**

In our evolutionary past, really good people did not leave as many offspring as people with a mixed moral nature. Because we evolved morality, we necessarily have a mixed moral nature, and necessarily cannot reach the perfection taught by great religious teachers. Even now, people who try to be like Jesus, and who work hard to make a better world, might achieve some satisfaction, but they usually fail miserably in terms of evolutionary success. They do not achieve power, wealth, fame, and great reproduction. They do not reproduce well and so the genes that helped them be very good decline. So what?

Maybe this is a case of evolution taking us beyond. Maybe it is important that some humans see beyond but not necessarily important that all humans live beyond. Maybe that occasional arising of a minority of visionaries helps the rest of us more than if we all did really evolve into angels.

Maybe it is better for some people to see the better world, fail, die, and drop their insightful genes out of the general human population. People with the genes will come along from time to time even if they also fail by normal standards and even if their genes never dominate. I think it is better to see the better ideal world but not necessarily to try to live in it while we are still in this world.

On a less "airy-fairy" level, for this world, we are back to the problem of why we should pay attention to great religious teachers if their advice is impractical, and if evolution has proven their advice impractical for at least the last 100,000 years. That is, why be very moral? The plainest way I can respond is: You either get morality or you don't. You either get the idea of trying hard despite a mixed moral nature and the disadvantages, or you don't. About 2500 years of Western moral teaching have tried to make sure that as many people morality as deeply as possible. In particular, they tried to make us get the teachings of Jesus. I can't improve on that tradition in the next few lines.

Morality originally evolved among small groups, and it works best among small groups. In fact, it works almost along the lines that Jesus taught. It is evolutionarily successful among small groups, and is not evolutionarily foolish. People live in large societies now but often their important lives go on among small groups-networks in which the teachings of Jesus make a lot of sense, even at work.

Even in large societies apart from small groups, morality works pretty well if not ideally. Even then, it is usually better to be mostly moral than amoral or immoral. People who act mostly morally, if not ideally, succeed about as well now as people who acted mostly well in our evolutionary past. Acting well leads to pretty good comparative success among our little networks where it counts. Most of us cheat a little but not much. We can recover from the small cheating of ourselves and our friends. We can still succeed in the game of competitive competition by acting well most of the time.

Every once in a while, somebody cheats on a big scale, makes a fortune or gains great power, founds a family, and the family goes on to success for generations on the basis of initial ill-gotten gains. Then the family tries to achieve good standing through charity and public service. That is not likely to happen to you, and I wouldn't plan my life around it. In my experience, people who act badly now eventually crash. The crash takes away more than they have gained both from themselves and their families. Business men who spend all their lives at the office lose their families. Academics who spend all their lives working on a big reputation rather than doing solid work find themselves relegated to a footnote a few years after they retire. That is more likely to happen to you than founding a dynasty.

These points do not make the world basically moral and do not mean the teachings of Jesus are bound to be strategically most effective in all situations. These points are merely an observation that the teachings of Jesus are right enough now.

### **No Perfect Consistency.**

Having a mixed moral nature is a kind of imperfection due to mixture and inconsistency. Just as we are doomed to suffer a mixed moral nature, so also we have to suffer misperception, susceptibility, deception, self-deception, a mix of many "modules" and proximal mechanisms not all of which are compatible, self-contradiction, animal urges such as the desire for burned meat, emotions, comparative competition, commitment, over-commitment, doubts, restlessness, craving, and other psychic forces too many to list. Maybe because we can never get enough success in evolutionary terms, and we are never the only one in the group who matters, we seem doomed to face a limit on satisfaction and we can never get enough satisfaction.

For some religions, this human dilemma is a real problem. Religions dream of perfecting humans. Part of reaching perfection is reaching perfect consistency. Another part of perfection is purging emotions with frequently bad results such as anger, jealousy, desire for stuff, and desire for power. It is very unlikely mere humans can ever reach such goals, not even monks who works for decades. If success in some religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zen, depends on reaching such perfection, the no human has ever achieved it.

If any person who started out as a mere human ever reaches such perfection, then I think we might have to stop thinking of that person as a mere human. What we then think about that person varies with the particular religion. It pains me to not think of Siddhartha Gautama the Buddha as a mere human being, but, if he did achieve perfection and freedom from all craving, then, to me, he was no longer human. I doubt that is the case. I think of Jesus as still human.

### **No Need to Be Perfect.**

Perfect people don't need religion. Religion is not for perfect people, it is for real normal flawed people. Imperfect people benefit from religion. Just as we don't need to know what it is all about to know what to do, we don't need to be perfect to act. The fact that we evolved, and evolved a mixed nature, helps make sense of why we need prophets and that we don't have to be perfect.

### **Who to Take Advice From.**

One of the big lessons of literature and politics after World War One is that leaders and useful people do not have to have a perfect character. A person can be quite flawed and still be human and useful. The most common example has been Winston Churchill. The drug habits of George W. Bush, and the sex habits of Jack Kennedy and Bill Clinton, are recent examples. I add the ignorance of Ronald Reagan. We are all flawed, so this lesson about flawed character succeeding is good to know.

Pop literature after World War Two took this idea too far: Useful people have to be flawed. The more flawed a person is, the more useful he/she is. Nearly-perfect people are really more flawed than flawed people, and far less to be trusted. Contrary to pop culture un-wisdom, in fact, not all bad boys and bad girls are more useful than good boys and good girls. Good boys and girls can still be very useful too. We can still take them for examples. Some of the great TV dads and moms, such as Andy Griffith, were good people and good role models. We need to search for the right balance of flawed and perfect in ourselves and in the people that we take for leaders and examples.

Religions make a point of seeing their leaders as perfect. Even stances and ideologies take their flawed heroes as perfect in their "flaw-ness". Mick Jagger is the perfect bad boy. Kurt Cobain was the perfect suffering artist. Angelina Jolie tried to be the perfect bad girl until age and reality caught up with her, and she realized heart is better. To save his career, Justin Bieber "went bad". To keep her career going for a long time, Taylor Swift knows how to keep the perfect balance of good and bad. George W. Bush is the perfect convert. When religions and ideologies offer a person as perfect, or perfectly flawed, we are right in being suspicious. If the leader really has achieved perfection, it is not clear that we can take him/her as an example for the rest of us.

It is a good idea to take advice from people who are flawed enough still to be human and yet who do not make a virtue of their flaw-ness. People who have something to say need to know something about what it means to be human. You don't find out what it is to be human without making big mistakes and without hurting a few people. Yet if you make a virtue of being damaged, of mistakes, and hurting people, then you haven't learned nearly enough about what it means to be human. This too is a lesson of history and literature but seems to be a lesson we forget in favor of ideologies.

Regardless of what dogma says, some religious leaders are more charmingly naïve than perfect. That is how I take Jesus, the Buddha, Chuang Tzu, Zen masters, and even Mohammad. They are idealists. There is nothing wrong with this. They could still be quite effective, and were. To say they are idealists is not to make a virtue of your flaws. Just as a child sometimes sees something that a jaded adult forgot, sometimes we need to listen to idealists. Their naivety gives them enough simplicity to be more perfect than usual. Sometimes that kind of simple incomplete perfection gives people insight and makes them worth listening to.

If I were really clever, I would devise a scheme to merge metaphysics with evolution: Evolution produces both not-perfectible contradictory complexity most of the time and naïve simple near-perfection from time to time. From that result, I could draw implications about God's plan; advise people who to listen to; and make imperfect people think they were more like the nearly-perfect prophets than they really are. It would sell well. That kind of cleverness is neither simple, consistent, near-perfect, nor worth listening to.

**Repeat: Objectively Existing Morality.**

At least since Plato about 2400 years ago, Western thinkers have seen morality as objectively “out there”. It is something that we discover and conform to, like we discover logic, mathematics, the laws of physics, or the rules of golf, and conform to them. Morality cannot be explained away by any reference to any kind of practicality, including power and evolutionary success. Morality cannot be explained away by any kind of “nothing but” reduction. Morality is more than brown eyes or curly hair. This view is useful when trying to merge God and morality. Mostly I agree. It is easy enough to take points of my argument as evidence for objective morality, such as the independent logic of morality and the likelihood that a similar morality would evolve anywhere morality evolved. Evolution did not make morality; evolution led us to discover moral logic and to conform to it.

The idea that our capacity for morality evolved seems to undermine the idea that morality is objective. This implication troubled Darwin greatly. I disagree. I hope it is easy to see how we could evolve to be aware of objective moral logic even if we don’t live up to it fully. Regardless of whether morality really is objective, my argument makes useful points, and, on the whole, stands. It is not useful here to embroil my argument in another argument about objectivity.

If morality is something in its own right, and cannot be explained away by “nothing but”, then what is it? What does that mean? These questions are what really lie behind current controversies about evolution, God, and morality. Questions about whether the capacity for morality evolved is often just a way to set up questions about what morality is and what that implies so as to lead into opinions that are held for other reasons. These are natural questions for a book on life stances but mostly I do not get into them. They are big topics in their own right, and I have to address other topics. Many people naturally invoke “God” at this point, and I have no strong objection. But the answer is not as simple as “God is goodness, and goodness is God”. I have already said I don’t think God can be immoral yet God tolerates evil in creation, and uses evil, and that I have no explanation.

**Naturalistic Ethics.**

Naturalistic ethics is the idea that morality, or at least moral lessons, are in nature, and we learn morality from nature. Even when we don’t anthropomorphize over cute little animals, we do tend to see morality in such effects as parents taking care of young, cooperation among prey to avoid predators, cooperation among predators to catch prey, the carbon cycle, and weather cycles. Natural ethics is like natural law, an important idea in the history of democracies. Naturalistic ethics predates evolutionary theory. It is not always clear how morality is in nature and what kind of morality is in nature. It is not clear how the fact that morality evolved affects naturalistic ethics. I like the idea of natural law. I don’t mind seeing moral lessons in nature. But I don’t think we could learn morality from nature or anywhere else if evolution had not already predisposed us to feel moral feelings along the lines of the moral logic of “applies equally”. The relations between naturalistic ethics and objective morality are not clear either, although, often, the two stances are taken as incompatible.

Another version of (what might be) naturalistic ethics says that ethics is only another proximate ability, and that ethics can be reduced to reproductive success, in the same way that hunting, flying, swimming, or fighting over mates, can be reduced to reproductive. As evolved beings, we could not be sensitive to

moral feelings or moral logic unless we evolved to be sensitive to them. That does not mean they can be reduced to “nothing but” or explained away as “nothing but”. We could not be sensitive to mathematics or to scientific method unless we evolved a predisposition to be sensitive to them, but that does not mean we can reduce mathematics or scientific method to reproductive success. I say more about the mistake of “nothing but” reductionism in later chapters on the self and on atheism.

I didn't go more into these issues because I don't have to settle these issues for the points that I make here to have value.

### **Do Not Metaphysical-ize Evil or Good-and-Evil.**

Just because individuals have a mixed moral nature, God allows badness in the universe, and God used badness in evolution, does not mean that badness is a thing in itself or is a force in itself. Good and bad are not locked together in a mutual pact. They do not need each other in some spiritual or metaphysical sense. We do not need evil to see good. God is not by necessity a mix of good and bad. Badness does not by necessity have an objective existence. Evil is not a metaphysical principle. Evil is not a principle personified in the Devil. The Devil is not an archetype. Jesus and the Devil are not twin brothers locked in combat forever. You cannot become more godlike by acting badly or by hurting people. These are all self-delusory stances that allow you to excuse self-indulgence. Don't make these mistakes.

Exactly what it does mean is not settled. I do not know why God allows just the badness that he does allow.

Some stances, such as Taoism, urge us to get beyond simplistic ideas of goodness and badness. That is not the same as metaphysical-izing badness. It does not mean goodness is not real, or that the people who advocate getting beyond simplistic ideas of good and bad do bad things. It rarely means that Taoists do bad things. It is not an excuse to do whatever you want. Some early Christians made this mistake, and Paul severely scolded them for it. In this case, Paul was correct.

Thinking beyond simplistic good and evil so that you can indulge yourself does not make you a profound thinker. It does not set you free. It makes you a self-indulgent dangerous fool. If you really want to be a profound thinker, figure out how goodness arises so consistently out of chaos and badness, and figure out the implications of that.

### **Using Evolved Abilities for Fun and Otherwise.**

People evolved a rich repertoire of abilities such as sex, games, fame, wealth, art, religion, morality, and science. In the last 5000 years, we have taken many of our original abilities out of their natural setting. We learned skills that are based on the original natural abilities. Instead of hunting, people chase little white balls around a long beautiful golf course. Instead of taking chances on which way the rabbit will swerve, we deal cards to see how they fall.

Most deviations and augmentations are not harmful, and many are good. Modern scientific medicine is a deviation from original shamans but I much prefer modern doctors. I would rather have people chasing golf balls on a course than running down deer in the middle of my streets. People have a tolerance for

alcohol because we evolved as fruit-eaters, and some fruit naturally falls to the ground and ferments. So now we are able to drink beer, wine, and various spirits.

Some deviations and augmentations are bad, harmful, or annoying. I like music but I hate when loud crap is blasted out of rolling boom boxes (cars). Young people have always sought places to meet in private but dark bars and bad booze do not always make the best modern venue. Moderate drinking is OK but excessive drinking is quite bad.

As with other aspects of life, we have to choose. I take the Libertarian stance. Enjoy what nature gave us, and enjoy augmentations too, as long as we are consenting adults and we don't hurt anyone. Even if the actors endure some small harm, then what business is it of mine, and why should I get involved? If people want to drink, and they harm nobody, let them drink. Let them smoke marijuana. Let people have sex as they will. People can smoke tobacco in their own private separate dwelling as long as nobody else has to endure the poisonous smoke; they cannot poison me; they cannot smoke in public places or in contiguous housing such as apartments. People can eat whatever they want as much as they want but they must pay extra insurance if they get fat or likely will develop diseases for overeating.

### **Boons and Banes of Morality.**

Believe it or not, imitation, various proximate mechanisms, comparative competition, and manipulation can serve morality. We teach children morality through manipulation and imitation. We get them to act well by telling them to "act like Suzy" or to "do what Father Dave says". We use comparative competition to get people to act more morally – or at least more like the morality we want. Most PTA meetings, faculty meetings, meetings of PC people, and meetings of Right Wingers, feature heavy moral competition. The pursuit of fame and wealth can be channeled to serve the greater good. Apologists for capitalism sell it that way, and it even actually works that way often enough.

Imitation, manipulation, and especially comparative competition, also can be banes of morality. Trying to act more morally than somebody else, or act more morally than the norm, leads to acting badly. The modern equivalent, acting cooler than other people, goes down the same path. Imitating a cool jerk who does not really understand coolness makes you less cool and a bit bad too in a cheap way. Imitating "bad boys" and "bad girls" makes you un-cool, not really "bad" in the good sense, and not at all good; instead, it makes you silly and a nuisance. Comparative competition is "keeping up with Joneses". A person would have to miss all the literature and media of the 1900s and 2000s not to understand how keeping up with the Joneses leads to bad behavior. Religious-moral movements depend on imitation, manipulation, and keeping up with the holy Joneses.

### **Beauty.**

Morality has its own logic, to which natural selection has to conform in the long run. In contrast, pleasure and pain are almost (but not quite) free of any logic that constrains natural selection. Evolution can apply pleasure almost to any act that leads to success, even to an act like childbirth. It would be convenient for theorists if beauty either had little intrinsic logic, like pleasure and pain, or had a clear single logic as with morality. Beauty has some logic but no clear single comprehensive guiding logic. Legions of art critics in the West, at least since Socrates and Plato about 400 years before Jesus, have shown there is some

logic, and have offered us their bit of aesthetic insight as the essence of all the logic of beauty. All have failed so far. The fact that so many can have partial success but none can have full success shows that beauty has some logic but no single clear comprehensive logic that we see so far.

The problem is compounded by the fact that beauty likely is more diverse than pleasure and pain or than morality. Without going through every idea that art critics have offered, I can list highlights: prettiness, symmetry, balance that is not necessarily symmetric, harmony however defined, charm, a variation of sex, a variation of sexual attractiveness, awe inspiring, inspiring to morality, and aesthetically effective without necessarily being pretty. These aspects are not compatible; they are also not exclusive; they are not all clearly defined from some other common idea; and more than one applies at a time even when they are not fully compatible. Here is a line from John Lennon: "Yellow matter custard dripping from a dead dog's eye". It is quite effective in its place, and so beautiful, but it is hardly pretty.

Scientists have shown that we tend to see as beautiful those things that are conducive to evolutionary success, and we tend to see as more beautiful things that are more conducive to success. Men see women in general as beautiful, and see women who are healthy and have body proportions that are likely to make them good mothers as more beautiful. Men see women with good personalities and who are skillful also as beautiful because they are as likely to have success as women who merely have good proportions. Women see men as handsome (male beauty) for the same reasons. Landscapes with the right amount of trees, open grassy spaces, and water, and that are likely to support many vegetables, fruits, and game animals, we see as beautiful. Yet this cannot be all there is to beauty. We hear John Lennon's poetry as beautiful. We see the open ocean or the baking desert as beautiful. We see pictures as beautiful even though looking at them does not lead to immediate evolutionary success. The art of the 1900s boasts thousands of images that are aesthetically effective without necessarily being pretty such as Fauvism and Cubism.

This issue is important because it bears on religion and morality. We have the same feeling of beauty and awe in religion that we have toward other beautiful things. We make our gods in the image of healthy strong young men and women, with a mixture of ideals from our culture and society. Pictures of Jesus or the Buddha likely are wildly inaccurate – Jesus was not a northern European from about 1910 with a neatly clipped beard and a short haircut. Religion uses the feeling of beauty to draw in and hold people. Some religious visions are quite awe inspiring regardless of their likely truth. It is not likely any major religion could survive for long if it did not lend itself to a many various beauties. We need to separate the feeling of beauty from particular religions. We can't disentangle religion from beauty until we know more about beauty. This book does not dwell on this problem but I do point it out sometimes. I do not dwell on this problem because it is too hard to make sense of it given the current state of thinking.

## **PART 7: Optional: Evolution of Religion.**

Please see the section on religion in Part 2. Please read Part 3 before this Part.

If we mix natural imaginative thinking, "irrational" commitment, "irrational thinking", categories, lively world, intentions, enduring relations, bridging of categories, and distorting of categories, we get spirits added to (my idea of) the natural world. Really, all we need is a lively world and semi-persons. From this base, we get personification of places, events, and ideas. We get spirits that don't necessarily personify anything

but can sometimes. For example, when wind moves, we see not just air with different pressures but a life with a will moving air around. When we see a large mountain, we see not just a pile of dirt and rocks but a being with a will, and who can be dangerous and useful. The gain we get from seeing a lively world with spirits likely far outweighs the world without spirits. The spirits can form their own spirit-real world like the real natural world.

Not only do natural things have spirits, so do living individual people and dead people. Categories of people have a particular spirit, often in addition to their particular individual spirit or in place of it, such as pregnant women, hot-headed young men, our family, their family, our group, and their group.

Scientists used to debate which of these spirits might have served as the original model for all spirits but that question is not useful here.

We have different relations with different spirits. All spirits tend to be of higher rank and more powerful than individual people, so individual people “curry favor” with the spirits by giving gifts and doing services. People sacrifice to spirits and worship them. When people approach spirits, people act as individuals and on behalf of whole groups. In return for gifts and services, spirits protect individuals and groups. Spirits also can be allies in conflicts, as with coconuts above, and in many famous battles featured in the Tanakh (Old Testament) and in the Hindu epic Mahabharata.

Sometimes it is easier to think of the spirit as a “force”. Things, situations, and events that have spirits also have a force, a vice versa. The cold snowy windy mountain has a force. The hurricane has a force. Springtime and winter have a force. Love is a force, and it has a spirit. It is probably not worth trying to separate out the two ideas in normal human thinking, at least here. Where there is a spirit, there is a force, and vice versa. Where there are a lot of little forces, people tend naturally to drift into the idea of one big Force, as in Star Wars.

“Animism” is paying attention to forces and spirits. Modern religions think of all animism as “polytheism”. “Polytheism” is literally the worship of “many deities”, but the difference does not matter here. The first form of religion very likely was animism. Evolutionary biologists now are re-discovering an idea that has been current in some schools of anthropology at least since Edward Burnett Tyler explained it in the middle 1800s.

From animism, monotheism grew, just as the idea of one big Force grows out of the idea of many smaller disparate forces. Monotheism is not an idea that prevails in many societies and cultures. It is an odd unusual idea. It developed out of polytheism-animism after the genetic basis for belief in polytheism-animism already was set. There are no genes for monotheism and there are no genes that naturally lead us to the idea of one single good God; God did not implant the idea of himself in our genes either by direct intervention or indirectly through evolution. How monotheism arose in history is not entirely clear, and the topic is not important for this book. Even though the belief in one God has genetic roots in our evolved nature, and even though it developed out of earlier polytheism-animism, those facts do not mean it is false or true. Whether it is true or false is a much different question. I have already decided that it is true. You are free to agree or disagree.

Animism does not go away just because some people get theoretically sophisticated about their religious beliefs, as with monotheism. The large majority of people still believe in ideas such as giving-back-and-forth, spirits, the Force, and the group-as-giant-person. The large majority of people are still animists even if their official religion is strongly monotheistic.

### **Religion and Morality Go Together.**

Religion and morality evolved together. They usually support each other. Very likely, when they evolve, they are always together and mutually supportive. I doubt one could evolve without the other.

Once people have the idea of spirits, they can use spirits to reinforce morality. If you act well, the spirits reward you. People who act well, when they act among other people who also act well, that is, when they act well in their own group, tend to do well. People who act badly toward near kin, friends, and neighbors get abused in return. The spirits really do reward good guys and punish bad guys most of the time.

Once people have the idea of morality, it can be used to reinforce religion. We want beneficial relations with the spirits. The spirits are supposed to reward people who act well, and people who act well do well, so the spirits must really exist, and they must at least recognize morality most of the time. Even if the spirits are not entirely good, even if they are sometimes impish or even bad, at least, as persons, they recognize morality (see below) and respond to it. The fact that they respond to morality makes morality a force in religion. As persons, at least some spirits are more good than bad, and those are the ones that become most important in our relations and in our religion.

### **Religion is Both Quite Sane and Partly Crazy.**

We can't make all bits of the world equally lively and we can't relate to all the lively things equally. Some things lend themselves to being more lively, especially things that move on their own and with which we interact closely such as a car. Some things we interact with more, and we tend to make them more lively, such as our houses or the Internet.

We have to select which parts are livelier and which parts we interact with more. Religion is an integral part of selection. For example, where people have to hunt big game, and compete with other predators, they tend to make animals and predators quite lively and to give them spirits. Among North American plains "Indians" ("native Americans"), bison and wolves tended to have their own spirits. Where people grow grains to make a living, they give grains a spirit. Where society is complex, for various reasons, people give the subgroups within society their own spirits.

Whenever we select, we have to commit. If we see bison as having a spirit, and we interact with them more than prairie dogs, then we have committed. If we fish for a living, and one subgroup in our society represents salmon, then we have a different attitude, relation, and commitment toward that subgroup. Our subgroup has its own spirit, and we certainly have a different attitude, relation, and commitment toward our subgroup and its spirit than toward other subgroups.

Religion is one of our biggest guides in selection and commitment. When we say oak trees have a spirit but pine trees don't, then we have made a commitment about the world, people, and society. Religion is not neutral.

In being not neutral, religion differs from the ordinary mundane everyday world. In not being exactly like the regular obvious world, and in demanding commitment, religion is a little crazy. Some crazy is good. People who have a strong relation to wolves as part of their religious commitment are not neutral and so are a little bit crazy. But their craziness helps them make sense of the world, act, and get along. They know how they stand with the people who have a special relation to bison, coyotes, or the river.

At the same time, religion can't be too crazy or it "turns people off", and they won't commit. People who identify with wolves can't really live like wolves in all aspects of their lives. They can't run around on all four legs and have six pups at a time. In being a little crazy, religion helps people to act and succeed. If religion gets in the way of success by being too crazy, people give it up in favor of other ways of seeing that are not so crazy.

Religion has to find a balance between being crazy enough to inspire commitment and guide action versus being so crazy that it causes disadvantage and alienates people.

To find the balance, religion can't be static. Religion has to be able to change somewhat to go along with changing conditions. If wolves become extinct, the wolf people might have to forge an alliance with the coyote people. If the number of wolf people dwindles even if wolves themselves don't go extinct, the wolf people might still have to forge an alliance with the coyote people. Commitment and the need to change don't always work well together. Commitment resists change, and change undermines commitment. Still, most religions that survive solve these problems.

### **Human Irrationality.**

People do not see the world exactly as it is, not only due do limitations of merely physical beings but also because to see the world inaccurately sometimes is better. Effective action requires strong commitment. Morality, as effective action, often requires strong commitment. Strong commitment is not strictly rational. Sometimes it is irrational. Sometimes it borders on the crazy. Religion is often irrational. Although I do not make the case, art is often irrational.

Much of human life is irrational, and people like it. People need their ceremonies, holy days, candles, icons, blessings, civil ceremonies, black versus white, good versus evil, television preachers, political demagogues, church services, etc. We just have to get used to irrationality. We have to put up with it when that is all we can do. Sometimes we can learn to enjoy it.

If we try to force people to be rational, especially to be our version of rational, then we usually do much more harm than good. The obvious examples are American Prohibition and War on Drugs, but as much damage is done by Political Correctness of both the Left and Right.

Of course, irrationality can be a source of badness, and that we don't have to put up with. So much has been said about irrational badness, how to recognize it in ourselves and others, and what to do about it, that I don't repeat here.

Some good can come of irrationality. Religion is irrational but religious people argue it is good irrationality and I don't wish to argue too hard against them. The lesson is to pick from religion what is good despite being irrational, or because it is irrational; then keep the good and reject the bad. Getting "ripped" every once in a while often does more good than harm. Screaming at a sporting match is fun as long as that is not the only mental activity you ever have.

A modern mistake is to romanticize and glorify irrationality, especially emotion as super-rational and necessarily morally superior. We already have enough irrationality. We don't need to cultivate even more irrationality, and we don't need to add insult to injury with an irrational argument that irrationality is better. You, and others, already have enough irrationality so that you can enjoy what you have without wanting more. Do enjoy it as long as you don't do much harm, then let go.

It can sound as if I say: "The masses at heart are irrational fools. Let them have their stupid irrationality as long as they do little harm. Make sure we minimize the harm they do. Don't expect them to be as rational as us wise people." The worst effects of such patronizing are that it allows "the masses" to get away with bad irrationality and it allows us to not help people to be better thinkers, including to be more rational. Yes, we have to put up with a lot of irrationality from "the masses". But the masses also have a lot of rationality, a lot of good common sense, and basic decency. That is what schools are supposed to cultivate. We should put up with civil and religious ceremonies but we should also expect people to think as well and they can and we should teach them to do that. It is not nasty to expect people to work to think better. It is not condescending to help people think better, to teach them to think better. Some people can become really good thinkers if we believe in them and help them. Becoming a really good thinker is not to become a computer.

### **Extending Moral Groups.**

When great prophets, such as Jesus, want us to be better, they urge us to extend moral logic by ignoring superficial differences while recognizing deeper similarities. They do the reverse of what bad people do when bad people find distinctions so bad people can use misguided moral fervor. People evolved to be able to extend in some situations, and to ignore some differences, but people also evolved not to be able to extend willy-nilly and to ignore all differences. When we marry, we have to extend the feeling of "us" to our spouse and our children, and often we have to extend "we" to the family and group of our spouse as well. If we wear blue shirts while they wear green shirts, we have to overlook the difference of blue and green to find the common human skin beneath. It is hard enough to do this over marriage. It is harder to do it to the neighboring "tribe", town, state, country, ethnic group, religious group, etc. It is even hard for men to extend full humanity to women, and vice versa. I could guess when we can extend and when we cannot, but, at present, there are no simple clear guidelines, and so I don't guess. It is clear enough that people in state societies have to extend more than is common in human nature, but that we can do it. It is clear enough that we will have to extend quite a bit if humanity and life are to endure on this planet. It is not clear that we can do it.

**PART 8: Optional: Evolution of Morality.**

Please refer to the sections on morality in Part 2. Please read Part 3. It might help some people to read Part 9 before Part 8.

We have moral feelings, make moral judgments, act morally, offer moral argument, and are susceptible to moral argument, because, in our past, people who had moral feelings etc. succeeded better than people who did not have moral feelings etc. We have moral feelings etc. because our ancestors who had moral feelings etc. succeeded and we are their descendants. If moral feelings etc. had not worked better than amorality, immorality, and moral laxness then we would not have morality now. For ease, I use “morality” or “moral feelings” to imply all of morality including acts etc.

At the end of Part 3, I noted some puzzles of morality. Here they are again.

(1) Morality is an ideal. As an ideal, morality tells us to care for other people as much as we care for ourselves. Yet morality evolved out of self-interest. How can an ideal that tells us to transcend self-interest arise out of self-interest?

(2) Morality is a combination of both irrational emotion and considered rational judgment.

(3) Morality largely serves practical self-interest. It helps people do practical things that they could not achieve without morality. People are adept judges of practicality most of the time. So why do people need irrational emotional morality to get them to do what is in their own practical self-interest? Why can't people reap the benefits of practicality, especially of cooperation, without irrational emotional morality to push them and bind them?

(4) Ordinarily we think that rational strategic consideration best serves practical self-interest. Yet people cannot achieve full practical self-interest without irrational emotional morality. People need irrationality to achieve supposedly rational practicality.

(5) Morality works as an ideal only because it doesn't work as an ideal. If people were fully moral, then their moral society would fall apart, for many reasons. People need apply morality selectively to keep the ideal of at least some morality. People need to be good to some people, indifferent to others, and bad to yet others, so people can keep the ideal of morality and be good to the select few.

(6) Imperfect people are often more interesting than really goody people.

(7) Nobody can be morally perfect.

(8) Somewhat paradoxically, we are often better people when we are less morally perfect, or at least when we try less hard. We often do more overall good even if we do a little damage along the way. Society often achieves more benefit when people are not as concerned with goodness.

(9) We get nervous around strongly moralistic people. We appreciate a little urging but don't like being told we are piles of shit (Martin Luther), and we will go to hell if we don't straighten up right now and do

what a zealous moralist tells us. While morality is an ideal, it seems to work best when it is not extreme. Can an ideal be an ideal but not be absolute?

(10) The West has opposed emotion to reason since at least Plato, 2400 years ago. The Hebrews had their version of this dichotomy and preference in “personal indulgence versus God-given Law”. The two versions fused after Jesus and the early Church Fathers. Previously, the West extolled reason above emotion. Since 1800, the West, and, now perhaps most of the world thanks to Western pop culture and Romanticism, extols emotion above reason. Which view does morality support?

It is useful to boil it all down to three basic topic clusters:

(1) Given that humans are quite adept at figuring practicality, at figuring what helps and hurts reproductive success, why were specifically moral feelings useful? What does morality do that rational reckoning of practicality can't do and-or that other feelings can't do?

(2) How did moral feelings arise in the first place? What makes moral feelings differ from other feelings, especially feelings that lead to action?

(3) (2A) How did morality work to aid individual reproductive success, or to aid family success, in small groups of foragers? (2B) Given that morality is an ideal, why are we more moral to some people and less moral to other people or even bad to some people? (2C) Why do people sometimes act morally in ways not likely to help reproductive success, as when a person pulls a strange child from a burning car?

I don't repeat much from the sections on morality in Part 2. I repeat a little for reference.

### **The Evolution of Morality and Cooperation.**

People get more done by cooperating. Some things can be done only through cooperation, and those things are important such as hunting in groups, defending, going after other groups, sharing food and chores, and tending the ill. Think of simply living together in peace and harmony as cooperation. Almost always a group that cooperates because its members feel morality out-competes a group that does not, and so all the individuals in the moral group do better than all the individuals in the group that does not feel morality and cooperate.

Unfortunately, cooperating is beset by problems, of which maybe the most obvious is cheating. Morality helps overcome the problems of cooperation, especially cheating, so moral people can reap the benefits. Apparently evolving people could not overcome problems of cooperation in any way other than through irrational emotional idealistic morality. We cannot overcome problems of cooperation by merely rationally weighing self-interest.

Moral feelings might have developed as an extension-and-modification of feelings that we already had for close kin, friends, and exchange partners. See Part 4 above about kin selection (inclusive fitness) and reciprocal altruism.

However we got moral feelings and judgment, assume we already have moral feelings, make moral judgments, and act according to our judgments. Then we need to see what happens.

Mutual help, through morality or in any way, works better if people focus cooperation on the other people who cooperate in return. Mutual help works better if moral people focus morality on other similarly moral people. As long as people can focus moral actions on other people in the group who also act morally toward them, as long as almost everybody in a group can focus moral acts on each other, then they all do well, and they all leave more descendants than people who do not act morally and-or who cannot focus moral relations on each other.

While morality helps individual practical self-interest, and depends on practical self-interest, morality does it all in a group setting. Morality helps the formation of groups, and helps the formation of particular kinds of groups. In fact, morality likely could not continue, could not be selected for, without that particular kind of groups. This situation raises a chicken-and-egg problem that I don't go into here. This situation is the basis for never-ending bickering between Darwinists and non-Darwinist anthropologists.

Morality works also because moral action is not usually a matter of one wronged person, or even a few wronged people, against one cheater. Part of morality is that almost the whole group has to go after bad people and uncooperative people. Part of morality is the right of moral people to ask other moral people to help in case somebody cheats, or "slacks off", and should get punished. Part of morality is the right of moral people to get angry at other would-be moral people who do not help, do not help enough, do not get angry at cheaters, and do not join in active punishment. Moral indignation and moral guilt are part of the moral complex of ideas, feelings, judgments, and acts, and make morality strong. When one person wants to go after another, he-she builds up his-her case and support in the community. He-she "gets the moral ducks in a row".

(Through punishing wrong-doers and non-cooperators, we can get people to do almost anything. We don't need moral feelings or judgments. So, Darwinists who offer punishment as part of morality have to say why morality is needed in addition to punishment. Darwinists are aware of this problem and have done work to deal with it. I don't summarize the issue here.)

We don't want morality to get people to do anything. We want morality to get people to do moral acts and cooperative acts. We want morality to stimulate people not only from fear of punishment but for the sake of the ideal and the act. Darwinists have to think how morality works with and without punishment, and how punishment works with and without morality. I don't go into the issue here.

As mentioned in Part 2, when we pay attention to how we really act morally, we don't act according to the ideal of loving everyone. Mostly we act according to strategic self-interest.

Here we need caution. Not all systems of morality say we should act according to universal love. I think most systems only say we should act toward more people more kindly than usual. Most systems are about ordering human relations without necessarily pushing us to an absolute ideal. Most systems of morality say how we should act toward particular kinds of people such as parents, brothers, sisters, children, in-laws, cousins, members of another spirit group, members of groups with whom we trade, and members of groups with whom we don't trade. If a hunter kills a rabbit, with whom should she share and

how much? If two hunters kill a deer, with whom should they share and how much? Moral ideal absolutes such as “love your neighbor as yourself” might be implicit but they linger in the background. Most of morality is about other matters; those other matters are what people think of as morality. For most people, most of the time, morality was more like Jewish Law and less like the parables of Jesus or the simple teachings of great rabbis. Trying to sort all this out here is not possible. So, I take that morality tells us to act better to most people than we might ordinarily act, and morality holds as an ideal that we act toward all people as if they were close kin, as if they were us. I accept ideal morality. Now we need to think about the relation between ideal and real.

When we look at how we do act, we find that we act about as we would act according to the ideas of kin selection, inclusive fitness, and reciprocity that were given in Part 3. We help people who are related to us about according to how we are related, they help us about according to how we are related, we help people with whom we share work and marriage, and they help us according to how we share work and marriage. In morality, we follow practicality as practicality is determined for us by natural selection and reproductive success.

In that case, why do we need morality? Why isn't following practicality enough? Likely practicality alone is not enough because, to cooperate and reap the benefits, we need to act a bit better, on a wider scope, than obvious practicality tells us to act. If we look carefully, we find that, with morality, we cooperate and act kindly a little more intensely and toward a slightly wider circle than mere strategic rational kin selection and mutual reciprocity would lead us. Without morality, we might be able to cooperate with siblings but likely we have only a couple of siblings at most, and we need half-a-dozen people to hunt a group of deer or to gather wild rice safely in dangerous water. We need the extra little nudge.

Why is the extra nudge only a little? Why doesn't the nudge go further and make us kind to, and make us cooperate with, a big group of group mates, or even across groups so that people in half-a-dozen groups all act as if they were siblings? Why doesn't the nudge get us to live up fully to the ideal?

To answer that question, we first have to see other issues. Compared to small groups, large groups are more susceptible to cheating and all the problems of cooperating. Think how much easier it is to maintain moral standards in a small group, a small church or musical group, and how much harder to maintain standards in a large groups, a large church or big band.

The nudge should be small enough to get small groups to hold together reliably but can't be enough to get people to try to form large groups with greater risks. A large nudge would not be very useful, and might be dangerous, while a small nudge often would be enough. A small nudge is more efficient. In that case, natural selection almost always chooses the most efficient option, the small nudge. The actually evolved nudge is not strong enough, and need not be strong enough, to get us to go much beyond what is set up already by kin selection and reciprocity.

If the nudge is only needed for small groups, can't work on large groups, and so is only a small nudge, then is any moral nudge really necessary? Can't assessment of practicality do the trick? Can't a simple extension of the rational logic of reciprocity and kin selection do the trick? There is no definite answer to this question but apparently the answer is “no”. Even with small groups an extra nudge is needed that mere rationality cannot provide.

If only a small nudge is needed, and a big nudge couldn't work, then why does the nudge have to come in the form of an ideal, morality, with potentially universal absolute scope? Why does the nudge have to feel like a very big nudge? This way leads to an inevitable contradiction between the ideal absolute motivation that we need to act and the necessarily limited scope of our real action. We have to talk in terms of loving everybody when in fact we know we can only love a few people who are near, dear, and cooperative. Again, there is no clear answer. Rather than give a lot of speculation here, basically, all I say is that people need universals, ideals, even absolutes, to get even a little bit beyond what immediate practicality tells us. The use, and misuse, of ideals and absolutes is the price we have to pay for the nudge beyond obvious self-interest that leads us to effective cooperation. The nagging contradiction between what we should do and what we know we will do is part of the price, and part of the human condition. I write more about this issue elsewhere.

What happens in a group if people act strictly according to any ideal? Suppose we tried to run America strictly according to the ideal of "tough guy (and girl)", honor, Justice, or Truth? Society would fall apart. Society would not fall apart because the ideal is wrong but for two other reasons. (A) Most of life is not about any particular ideal, and trying to force life into the "Procrustean Bed" of any ideal only freezes life and people. It adds a huge overhead, enough to destroy. What if we had to consider Honor and Pride whenever we bought lunch or went to a garage sale? (B) There is more than one ideal. Ideals conflict. Much as we might like, we cannot have Justice and Pride together. The conflict of ideals worsens the problem when we try to run society according to an ideal only.

How many ideals are needed for full human society and full human life? How did we get any ideal? How do they work in society? How do we judge between ideals? How do we know when to leave ideals alone and simply get on with life? These are relevant interesting questions, especially for Darwinists, but I can't take them up here.

What happens when people do act morally strictly, as much in accord with the ideal as possible? First, what happens depends on the size of the group. Strict morality can work in small groups where people know each other quite well, usually when they are at odds with a bigger group around them, even when they owe their living to the bigger group, as with religious groups in America such as the Amish and Jews in Europe for a long time. But strict morality cannot work even in modestly sized groups, and especially cannot work in groups where people don't know each other quite well and don't have a strong reason to stick together. That is, strict morality can't work in real groups. People cannot resist short-term self-interest, and so cheating comes again.

Second, as with other ideals, acting strictly according to morality tends to freeze people so that people don't act on opportunities that they might otherwise have taken, so that people lose out on some benefit that they might otherwise have gained. When people act with great strictness, paradoxically, the group overall benefits less (achieves less total welfare) than if people have enough freedom. It is not true that "to ask forgiveness is better than to ask permission" but it is true enough. People need not to worry about morality always. People need to feel confident they can make a few mistakes, be forgiven, and get over the problem with modest restitution if needed. Morality arose out of self-interest. For morality to throttle self-interest is for morality to kill its parents. The overall greatest good for a group comes when people follow morality generally, don't break any serious rules, but otherwise are free to pursue self-interest.

Exactly where to draw the line is a big topic, and the line varies by culture, society, conditions, and history. I don't go into the issue here. It is important to say that people in general have a sense that too much morality can be bad, and that we need some freedom. So people are naturally suspicious of too much morality and fight against too much morality.

Third, morality conflicts with other goals and other ideals, such as Honor, Revenge, wealth, power, and Family. While a moralist might say that morality has to come first and be on top of the ideal heap by its very nature (I come close to saying this below), natural selection does not look at it that way. That ideal wins, in particular types of situations only, that leads to the most reproductive success, in those particular situations only. No ideal need come out on top all the time. There need be no dominant ideal. Trying to force one dominant ideal all the time adds to action freeze and reduces practical success.

Natural selection would give morality the force of an ideal strong enough to get us to cooperate in fairly small groups most of the time but no more power or scope than that, under normal conditions. How it is that modern people can cooperate to live in states is another issue entirely from what I raise here.

Morality requires that sometimes moral people get after bad people and even get after other moral people who are too lax. Morality requires some moralistic people, attitude, and acts. The facts that morality is an ideal, and there is always a gap between real and ideal, open the door for moralistic harangue. Yet people don't like to be prodded morally and made to feel guilt. (A) Moral selection, including not getting too worked up about all transgressions, is in accord with the general selectivity of people about acts. People get a lot huffier when they personally suffer wrong or someone near them suffers wrong than when somebody unrelated suffers wrong. We get morally angry when an unrelated visiting child steals from our purse but only get sad when our own child steals. We want not to be goaded into acting on an ideal in every case, especially when self-interest tells us that we don't benefit by acting on the ideal in every case. (B) People sense that getting too moralistic might do more harm than good. It upsets the balance between ideals and freedom that is needed for their own best benefit and for the possible best benefit of the group.

(C) Most importantly, moralistic harangues, and manipulation by guilt, are ways for some people to use other people, almost always in the self-interest of the moralistic people. When one office worker wants to "get" another, the first worker "runs down" the moral character of the second so the people of the office will take the side of the first. Yet the second worker really might not be worse than anybody else. When one politician goes after another, the first always attacks the moral character of the second, and drums up moral outrage. If one cunning person can use morality against another, he-she might later use morality against me, my kin, or my friends. Even if, in some cases, a person is justly accused, the whole tactic of moralistic attack is dangerous. Moralistic attack leads to overly-moralistic behavior that erodes the overall welfare of the group. It is better not to let cunning people use morality as a weapon at all. It is better not to fall into the habit of moralistic thinking. One way to hold the line against overly-moralistic behavior is to hold the line against moralistic attack and the moralistic people who tend to use it often. We suspect them. We don't like them. Even when they are right.

Moral life in early human groups was not simply about trying to get as many people as possible as much as possible to live up to a simple easily-understood ideal. Even in early groups, living more morally might have made things worse, not better, even though living somewhat morally certainly did make things much

better. Even in early groups, there were sub-groups of kin, friends, and allies, and people had to act a bit differently toward his-her sub-groups and toward the whole group. Even in early groups, morality could never be the only consideration and often was not even a relevant consideration. Even in early groups, morality competed with other ideals such as Honor, Courage, and Beauty. All this is even more so today in complex societies. Morality is quite important to me, but I have to see it for what it is, how it evolved, and its role for good and bad in the real current world.

### **Variety of People; People are overall more Good than Bad.**

Even in a basically moral group, some cheating happens. Even your most angelic best child sometimes steals a cookie. We have all used moralistic cunning. Morality can end some cheating but not all. As a result, even in a moral group, (1) there will be a variety of characters, and (2) each of us will have within ourselves the potential to be good and bad. See movies about hucksters who go into a good community where they bilk the folk as in "The Rain Man".

Are people basically more good-moral or more bad-cheaters? How particular individual people turn out depends on circumstances, but I think people are more good than bad. I think most people can be taught to act quite well most of the time in the right conditions. Usually the conditions were right enough in our evolutionary past for cautious good attitude to be fixed as the basic predisposition. We start out giving people the benefit of the doubt. We start out acting mostly good with a little bit of opportunism, trying out badness sometimes. Sadly, people also can learn to be quite bad in the right conditions, as with children who are forced to be soldiers.

Here is one reason why people are usually more good than bad: Cheaters depend on moral people in a way that moral people don't depend on cheaters. Imagine a group in which only moral people do productive work while cheaters can only live if they have moral people to live off of. Moral people help each other while cheaters always harm the people they interact with. Moral people benefit, they benefit more with increasing numbers of moral people, they benefit with an increasing ratio of moral people in the group, they benefit even without any cheaters, and they benefit most without any cheaters. Cheaters cannot benefit without moral people, cheaters do not benefit much if there are many cheaters, they lose benefit the more cheaters there are, and they only hurt each other if there are only cheaters without any moral people. We can imagine a group of all-moral (or almost all-moral people); but we can't imagine a group of all cheaters because they would have nobody to prey on, and they would destroy each other. Briefly, moral people are "primary producers" while cheaters are parasites. Primary producers can live quite well without parasites but, without hosts, parasites die.

All people vary in propensities to cheat and to act with simple goodness, and, likewise, moral people vary in simple goodness and in zealotry. First, within each person, we have both simple goodness and fierce zealotry. Second, within groups, some people tend to be zealots by nature while others are simply good without being zealots. It is hard to say if people in general are more zealous or less zealous. I think most of us prefer not to be zealots unless situations bring out our zealotry. It can be dangerous to be a zealot, and it is convenient to let other people be zealots. When situations do call for craziness, then most of us can rage with moral indignation easily enough. We can even talk a big game and let other people do the dirty work of zealotry and of punishing bad people. This is part of our mixed moral nature too.

If we all have a mixed moral nature, and we all need some training to bring out the best, then we need to build institutions that bring out the best. Usually institutions that bring out the best also produce people that support those institutions such as charities, good schools, and democracy. People and institutions support each other. On the other hand, bad institutions produce bad people who sustain bad institutions such as tyranny and gangs. Usually the middle ground is narrow, and the situation goes one way or the other. It is hard to make a good balance and easy to fall into a bad balance. People who live in good situations are lucky. We need to make sure we fall on the side of good institutions and good people, and stay that way.

### **Morality, Intent, and Persons.**

Real morality requires the ability to read intent, and it requires empathy and sympathy. We have to be able to guess accurately what other people intend, what their motives are. We have to be able to guess adeptly what other people feel, and we have to feel along with them at least sometimes. In jargon, morality needs a solid “theory of mind”. We have to know what it means to be the “other” when we “do unto others”. At the same time, for morality to persist, we have to feel that other people can understand us, feel us, feel for us, and feel with us, too. We have to expect others in our group also to have a theory of mind, and their theory of mind has to be similar to ours. We have to believe that understanding, feeling about, feeling with, and feeling for, are mutual. We do not have to expect they really will treat us as well as we would treat ourselves.

When we read the intent of others, especially when we have empathy and sympathy, we see others as persons. Morality and the idea of a person evolved together. They imply each other. I mention this link again below, and the topic requires a lot on its own, so I leave the issue alone here. Even with animals, when we can read intent, have empathy, and sympathy, we see the animal as a person. About the time I wrote, some people wished to give chimpanzees, gorillas, and elephants the status of persons for many humanitarian (!) and legal reasons. It does little good here to argue about exactly where to draw the line as long as we do see the close ties between moral feelings and persons.

### **Altruism.**

Sometimes people do act in accord with the moral ideal at the expense of their apparent fitness (practical reproductive success) as when someone leaps into the street to snatch a strange child from an oncoming car.

Think of morality not as an ideal but as a mechanism or as a tool. Most tools have specific uses, an “ideal” for the tool, including the situations in which the tool should be used. At the same time, no tool is perfect. Sometimes the tool is used in cases that resemble the best situations but are not the best. Sometimes we use a wrench for a hammer, and sometimes we use a hammer to prop open a window. Ordinarily the people around us are close to us, are kin, friends, work partners, sharing partners, or members of our group. We develop the general attitude of kindness toward them; we develop moral feelings toward them. In those situations, it makes sense to snatch a child out of the way of a wandering water buffalo or a running herd of giraffe, even if the child is not ours. At the least, our act will dispose our moral partners to do the same for us. Even if we get killed, they will be kindly disposed to our relatives and friends, so we will gain indirectly through their gain. If the same attitude later leads modern people to

save strange children from automobiles, there is nothing to wonder about, and the act certainly does not repeal all the other ways in which morality does go along with our reproductive success.

As an ideal in human theory, morality should be universal; but so what? In evolution, universality is only a guide, a suggestion. Universality is not evolutionarily mandatory, and could not be made mandatory by natural selection. A modest sense of universality might be needed for morality to work but that does not mean really acting universally is needed for morality to work in natural selection. We should not confuse ideal with real even when the ideal guides the real somewhat.

### **Some Companion Ideas that are Important Later.**

Not only did we evolve to act morally most of the time, we also evolved the following ideas. I do not say why. We evolved to:

(1) Think morality is really important, about as important as anything else in life. Not all of us are like the “noble Romans” who put duty above family and life but nearly all of us understand the feeling.

(2) Think morality is real. We don’t think of morality as real in the same way we think of rocks as real but we do think morality is more real than the images that we see in clouds and more real than the ripples we see on water during a windy day – and, yes, I know the ripples are real.

(3) Link morality with the super natural. We think morality is real in the way other super natural things are real such as spirits of the storm. People that believe in high gods or in God think morality and the gods, or God, are closely related.

At the beginning of this chapter, I said morality is real. I use these points to support my belief. These points are not the most important support but they do help. The most important support is that morality has its own logic, the logic of the Golden Rule and “applies equally”.

I think dedicated Darwinists would use these points instead to argue that morality is merely evolved. The feelings that morality is important, real, and linked to God are all evolved, likely merely evolved and not true. If they are all merely evolved and not true, then they are bad evidence that morality is real. In fact, they are evidence against morality being real. So morality is not real. Morality is merely evolved, a handy delusion that serves reproductive success nearly all the time.

### **The Logic of Morality.**

I differ from mainstream Darwinism in 2016 because of how much I stress moral logic. I use the logic of morality to bolster my belief that morality is real while Darwinists pretty much overlook any particular logic that morality might have while they focus on how morality is used to support success. Morality is entirely, only, and nothing but its use. I disagree. I think morality is channeled by its logic. Morality IS something, and morality’s is-ness is important. So, here I explain a bit.

I do not discuss the logic of morality in the context of other ideals. I do not treat morality as one ideal to be comparted to other ideals but focus only on morality. I hope to do that elsewhere.

People can't argue much about taste in food but they do argue about morality. They argue the facts of a case, relations of facts to principles, and which principles apply. While not exactly the same, it is useful to think of court cases as arguments about morality. When a young person says "but that's not fair" he-she has to back up the assertion with ideals, principles, rules, standards, and precedents.

We can't argue about anything unless that thing has a logic. Usually we can't appeal to rules unless the rules are organized into a logic. We can't relate facts to rules without a logic. We do argue enough about morality, and in the right ways about morality, so that it has to have a logic. People can be susceptible to sensual appeals that don't have much of a logic such as the naked body of a healthy young person. But ordinarily people are susceptible to things as parts of systems with a logic. Immediate sex appeal makes sense but romantic movies only make sense as a set of ideas about relations and love. Even porn only makes sense in the context of logics; I let you figure out which logics. Sometimes immediate violence makes sense but movies about the American West, and films noir, even when they have a lot of violence, only make sense as a system of ideas about good, bad, justice, self-reliance, friendship, teams, etc.

Even purely physical systems follow a logic, and the logic makes a difference. We don't think of motion as following a logic but it does, and the logic makes a difference. It makes a difference if moving bodies follow Newtonian rules or Relativity. Crystals cannot form in any ways. They have to form following the logic of "group theory". Abstract mental systems have to follow a logic even when we don't just make them up. There are only so many abstract design patterns that can be made on a wall, and they too have to follow the logic of group theory. Each branch of mathematics has its own logic such as the logic of groups, hyperbolic geometry, or all the various infinities (there is more than one kind).

It makes sense that our mental abilities follow a logic even if they evolved. Now we have to decide which logic, or even which logics, morality follows. Of course, I think the logic of morality is in the Golden Rule and "applies equally". The key issue is whether even natural selection has to follow the logic but I cannot really go after this problem here. I can say enough to make more sense. I only illustrate. See my other writing.

Think about kin selection (inclusive fitness). We are kind to our kin, and we expect them to be kind to us, because we are part them and they are part us. We share genes, a lot of genes. Doing something to a kinsperson is like doing something to me. They feel the same way. The same is true of our constant partners in gathering food, sharing food, sharing child care, and other chores. Doing something to them is almost like doing it to me even if we are not (as) related as kin. They are in the same relation to us. In this situation, the only rule that consistently makes sense is the Golden Rule and "applies equally", with some allowance for different age, experience, particular individual skills, gender, etc. I am NOT saying that we are always kind to our kin and frequent work buddies, that we never compete, and that we never do bad things to each other. Bad things do happen, and bad relations do develop even with close kin. After all, they are not exactly us and we are not exactly them. But the only efficient way to approach the situation to begin with is to treat them much as we want them to treat us, and that means everybody treats everybody the same. We begin with the benefit of the doubt, with good intentions, and with good overtures.

Think about life in a group, with persons, the persons can read intent pretty accurately but not perfectly, and the persons have sympathy and empathy for each other. Sympathy means they have similar sets of feelings and they can read each other's feelings. Empathy means they can share the feelings so that they understand the feelings of others, know why others respond, and know they likely would respond similarly if they were in the situation of the others. If you do something to someone else, that is almost like doing it to yourself. If someone else does something to you, that is almost like the other person doing it to him-herself. Of course, natural selection made sure that we are not that empathetic and sympathetic, and did so in ways that serve reproductive success. Only saints, some avatars, and some bodhisattvas, are that sympathetic and empathetic. We have all ignored somebody else's feelings and done to them what we would not want anybody to do to us. And we have all been ashamed of ourselves later for doing it. Despite how empathy and sympathy might work out in particular cases, the underlying logic is that of the Golden Rule and "applies equally". As with morality in general, even though sympathy and empathy have been shaped to serve reproductive success, there is still an underlying logic, and this underlying logic is that of the Golden Rule and "applies equally".

Persons, morality, empathy, and sympathy all evolved together, and all share the same underlying logic of the Golden Rule and "applies equally". Each has other features, especially persons, but that does not change the common underlying logic.

If people are fairly free to leave a group and set up their own group, then morality has to follow "do unto others" and "applies equally". Under any other rule, some people in the group would have to gain while others would have to lose. If some people tried to make morality follow another rule, the other people who "lost out" because of the new rule would leave to set up their own group in which morality did follow that rule and only that rule. Eventually in free groups, people would have to settle into a rule something like the Golden Rule as the basic default position. From this default position, people could negotiate variations and people could maneuver for gain; but that does not change the basic default position. Not all basic default positions are encoded into our genes but I think this one is. No social animal is totally free to leave its group, set up another group, or join another group, especially with predation and strife between groups. I think evolving humans were free enough to set up new groups even given intergroup strife. This point is contentious in evolutionary theory now, and I don't go more into it here.

The theories that Darwinists use to understand cooperation, in particular game theory that relies only on "Prisoner's Dilemma", are set up so freedom to switch groups is not part of the game. The players are trapped in the game, usually in one group with no subgroups or alternatives. This limit is not realistic. When modified to allow switching between groups and memories about players and groups, I think the default condition of the Golden Rule and "applies equally" emerges.

Morality is an ideal, and a universal ideal. Moral teachers say to be good to everybody. This kind of an ideal goes along with the logic of the Golden Rule and is a mirror image of the logic of "applies equally".

People are adept at twisting moral logic to get around it and to use it for self-interest. People kill each other in the name of a good god. People enable their friends' bad habits. People are adept at making themselves feel moral about bad acts such as stealing. These abilities to twist logic and feeling do not alter the basic ideas just given. They do not mean morality can follow any logic or that evolution can apply moral feeling to any act.

In mainstream Darwinist thinking, moral feelings could apply to any act if that act furthered evolutionary success, even bad acts such as robbery. Moral feelings can go along with other feelings if the other feelings helped our evolutionary success such as greed; we can feel moral about feeling greedy or acting greedy. In contrast, I think moral feelings cannot apply to just any act and cannot go along with just any other feelings, no matter how much the act or feelings might have promoted our evolutionary success. We can feel clever about bilking old people out of their retirement through a Ponzi scheme but we can't really feel moral about it. We can rationalize so as to act badly and to cover up our bad feelings but deep inside we still know we have done wrong when we do not follow the Golden Rule and "applies equally".

Morality, sentience, sympathy, empathy, the idea of a person, ideals, universal ideals, the Golden Rule, and "applies equally" all go together and evolved together. I think they would all evolve together wherever they evolved. Thus even all extra-terrestrial aliens that feel morality would know of the Golden Rule and "applies equally". They would also all have a mixed moral nature and would be able to twist moral logic for self-interest. We can expect aliens to understand our morality but they might not act any better toward us than we have acted toward ourselves sometimes.

### **Pro-Sociality.**

People who act morally among each other promote their own particular individual success, the success of other group members who act morally too, especially ones who act morally among each other, and even the success of other group members who might not act as morally. People who act morally among each other promote overall group welfare. They help each other to find food, trade, care for children, defend food, defend the group, find spouses, and do all the other act that are important in group life. People who act morally also act "nicely" and "kindly" toward each other. They act like kin toward each other. Morality is "pro-social".

Politicians and priests promote morality as much for the pro-social effects as for the morality itself. We should be careful about this effect of morality. We tend to see this effect in terms of people sacrificing for the group. This way of looking can be misleading. The group benefits because members individually gain more benefit on average (some might lose but that does not change the average). If we think of group benefit in terms of the sum of individual benefits then the group does benefit when people act morally. We should not think that people would act morally for long if they personally lost benefit even if somehow the group gained benefit at the same time. If many people lost benefit, then the group would not act morally and could not gain benefit. The group does not come before individuals and it does not channel what individuals do. Individuals helping each other make the group better, partially directly but mostly indirectly.

### **The Legacy Carried Over.**

Because moral action was successful for our ancestors in general, we inherited a bundle of abilities that still shape our lives. We are more pro-social than an observer might expect for an evolved organism for which self-interest is basic (this result does not reduce the role of self-interest). We are susceptible to morality, kindness, friendship, and moralizing. We take people at face value until they show otherwise. We share. We trust. We give to strangers. We respond to appeals of all kinds, even from comparative

strangers. We cooperate. We plan together. We can delay reward for a long time. We can divide work and reward among a large diverse group. We “carry” people when they have problems. We expect other people to be moralistic enough. We learn cultural values and social roles. We expect all this of other people. We enforce expectations for good behavior and shared values through rewards, ostracism, and punishment.

Our abilities evolved among hunter-gatherer-foragers. We carried these abilities to other settings that arose later such as horticulture, agriculture, villages, towns, cities, states, occupations such as carpenter and blacksmith, labor unions, business firms, professions such as electrician and lawyer, long-distance trade, commerce, and capitalism. We adapted abilities that were originally suited for hunting bands to let us build complex democracies or complex fascist states. We could do that without changing hardly at all the underlying abilities – our “mental genes” are very likely nearly identical to the “mental genes” of our hunter-gatherer-forager ancestors.

Because moral action was successful for most of our ancestors, and because selfishness is often a way to succeed, we also inherited abilities to be amoral or immoral. We are not always bound enough by our susceptibility to morality. We can use the susceptibility of other people to morality against them. We lie, steal, cheat, seduce, run away, and act like cowards. We do not enforce expected good norms, and so we let down society, the people who trusted us, and our kin and friends.

Tendencies to good and bad exist in all people to some extent, and in all societies. Which tendencies come to the fore, how much, and in what ways, depends on the person, history, culture, society, and conditions. All in all, people have been pretty good, even given wars, exploitation, and the impending ruin of the planet. The harm that we do mostly we don't intend. Unfortunately, we also don't stop even when we clearly see the harm.

### **Reducing Morality to Nothing But Reproductive Success.**

If you don't like arguments about ideals, what is real and how, and relations to the super natural, you can be a good Darwinist and overlook those issues entirely. All you have to do is focus on how people really behave under considerations of morality, and check to make sure that what people really do goes along with their reproductive success, or would have gone along with their reproductive success in the past as we evolved our nature. You take that as evidence that morality really evolved, and use as much as you can to speculate on how morality evolved. This is what most Darwinists do.

I have nothing against this research strategy, and much good insight has come of it. I don't like that it tends to reduce morality to nothing but reproductive success, to explain away morality. It does not tell us how morality is distinct from any other trait that serves reproductive success such as drooling at the smell of burned meat, chasing rabbits, running from bears, having genitalia, or having orgasms. It reduces the variety and interest of life. It even reduces our ability to explain why various traits evolved because it overlooks the particular nature of particular traits, and so, in the long run, it actually reduces the power of Darwinism.

I prefer a more rounded view that takes account of how a trait works and what it is, including the logic by which it works and that might have affected how it evolved.

### **Optional Technical Insertion: Rules, Values, Strategic Interaction, and Society**

The need for rules, values, and institutions raises the following problems, which I do not solve.

First, imagine two people sharing a rabbit. How they share the rabbit can be seen by looking at their strategic options. If the two people are of about the same “power” likely they will share the rabbit about equally. We cannot so easily understand what happens with many people, as the example of sharing the deer from above shows. It is not easy to read off what really happens just from theories of strategy. Social scientists tend to think rules and values are the direct simple result of strategies, as in sharing the rabbit, but they are not. This mistake can be called “individualist reductionism”. It is true that rules and values have to come out of strategies and cannot stray far from a balance of strategic interest. People modify rules and values to go along with strategic interest. But they are not the simple direct reflection of strategic interest. The rule “the hunter gets the left leg” holds if the hunter weighs 90 pounds and is nice or weighs 200 pounds and is fierce. Rules and values have some autonomy of their own, and have an interesting relation with strategic interest. You cannot guess what will happen in a town meeting from reading “Roberts’ Rules of Order”; and you cannot derive “Robert’s Rules of Order” from knowing that people form power blocks. How this all works is not well known now. Social science theory can help but it also hurts by channeling the imagination.

Second, we are susceptible to rules and values as to sex and morality. We follow them, even when, at least in the short run, sometimes we suffer. Very likely we have capacities for rules and values, and the capacities are about as important as our capacity for morality. This result leads some social scientists to say that humans could not have evolved a capacity for rules and values unless natural selection occurred not just at the individual level but between groups: “group selection”. For decades, this idea was framed as group versus group, like “spy versus spy” from Mad Magazine, in which whole groups annihilated other whole groups. Now, the idea is often framed in terms of multiple levels of selection, from gene to small group to big group. It is too hard to summarize that idea here. It is a mistake is to think simplistic group selection entirely replaced individual action in the evolution of the capacity for morality and the capacity for rules and values.

Third, some social scientists dismiss biology and individual strategy. They say culture, social structure, social organization, or some other group dominates the individual and determines what he-she does. This is a mistake. Still, these thinkers use the importance of rules and values, and the susceptibility of people to rules and values, as evidence. These thinkers ignore how individuals institute rules and values, change rules and values, and maneuver within rules and values. In my experience, these thinkers have little feel for biology, individual strategies, and the interplay of individuals and rules.

### **PART 9: Optional: Needed Ideas about Morality.**

I repeat my request that you read David Hume and Immanuel Kant. See Part 8. This Part summarizes ideas that you need so as to think more about morality, and this Part repeats from above. Unless you already have some background, you can’t assimilate all the points in this Part at one sitting. They are meant for future reference and to guide you in future reading. They set up the argument in the next Part of the chapter on the modern Darwinian explanation of morality.

Morality is about is about goodness but it also includes feelings-ideas-and-judgments of good and bad, good and evil, right and wrong, should and should not, ought and ought not, fair and unfair, just and unjust, disgust and approval, “yes” versus “no, icky”, duty, rights, responsibility, and other feelings and assessments that I don’t list here. In this chapter, I write as if all the aspects of morality are pretty much part of the same greater thing. I don’t distinguish between the morality of fair and the morality of icky. In fact, I think most of morality can be unified under good and bad, the Golden Rule, and “applies equally”. In a longer work specifically on morality, I would explain, and would deal with feelings and ideas that did not fit under those three aspects of morality. Here, I just note the problem and go on.

Morality is about persons. Only persons can have morality and show morality. Morality cannot arise in rocks, amoebas, trees, forests, roses, clouds, storms, falling coconuts, and most animals; and morality cannot arise by natural selection in the single-onto-itself tree-based life force in the movie “Avatar”. Persons usually show morality between other persons. Morality is part of a relation of what Martin Buber called “I and Thou”. People can correctly show morality toward animals such as when people fight cruelty and when people wish to save endangered animals. People can correctly show morality toward aspects of nature and to nature as a whole, as when people save forests, ecosystems, and the planet. This does not undermine what I say. Part of morality is responsibility and duty, and wishing to help nature is a valid extension of those. When we think about how morality evolved, we have to think too about how persons evolved at the same time and what role morality played in interactions between evolving persons. When we think about how morality works now, we have to think of how morality and personhood work together and cannot work separately.

Some animals do show rudimentary morality but that is not relevant here and does not undermine what I say. Someday robots will be sentient and have no morality or have morality different than evolved human morality. That future also does not discredit what I say.

The fact that morality is based in persons affects how we see morality, what we expect, and how morality works. For example, the idea of “applies equally” assumes that everyone is a person, and that people have to be treated in accord with “applies equally”.

Likewise, the rules and facts of morality also shape persons. How morality works affects what we think is a person, what we think of persons, what we expect of persons, and what we expect persons not to do or be. If you are too moral, amoral, or immoral, too social or non-social, like power too much or not enough, then you cease to be a person. Some people become demons, some saints.

Another way to say morality is about persons is to say morality is about agents. Agents have to be free somewhat to act; they do not need absolute cosmic freedom. Agents have to have some free will and freedom of choice; they do not need absolute cosmic free will. Agents have to take responsibility for actions, and feel duties. Agents have rights.

In theory, morality could work with only two agents, or with only one agent and nature. In the real world, morality implies a community of persons who regularly interact and have expectations about each other. Morality implies communities. Interacting-somewhat-autonomous-agents-becoming-persons is the only way morality could arise under natural selection. So, naturally occurring morality always implies a group

of interacting persons. That is where we find morality now. Morality does not necessarily imply the kind of society that any particular interest groups now promote, including anthropologists, NGOs, politicians, ethnic activists, and religious activists. The relations between morality-in-general, particular moralities, and kinds of communities, are not clear. I don't have to clarify them. To repeat: the fact that morality and community are closely related does not mean that society makes the category "morality" or society sets all the content of morality.

This idea of agents affected the American Revolution and has affected mainstream non-Marxist economic theory since it began with Adam Smith in 1776 in his book "The Wealth of Nations".

While empathy and sympathy are not logically necessary for "applies equally", still morality, especially the Golden Rule, implies a lot of empathy and sympathy. It helps to know what other people think and feel, and to share in their thinking and feeling as much as our character and imagination allow. At the least, persons have to see each other as persons. For normal naturally evolved human beings, sympathy and empathy are needed for morality. Sympathy and empathy are part of naturally evolved group life among persons, and could only have evolved naturally in group life among evolving emerging persons. Morality, empathy, and sympathy had to evolve together. Not only did Adam Smith write about economics in terms of agents, he also wrote about moral sentiments and moral theory. The fact that morality, empathy, and sympathy imply group life does not imply society originated and fully controls sympathy and empathy. It does not imply any particular society or any social theory that is promoted by any modern group.

Morality is not just an assessment such as "the price of apples is too high today" or "I like Mozart but not Beethoven". Morality is a judgment. We approve or disapprove, extol or condemn, and offer reward or punishment, when we make moral judgments.

In theory, morality is one of the highest judgments we can make, perhaps the highest. Morality is right in case of a conflict of morality versus: you, family, God, any religion, any dogma, any Church, any country, any political agenda, or humanity. Few things may judge morality. Morality can judge almost anything.

Of course, in practice, we do not apply morality in the vast majority of human acts or ideas, as when we buy coffee. In practice, other things often trump simple morality, as when people choose their country or their family over what is good, even when they know better. This kind of ranking and choice despite the clear ideal of "morality first" made only intuitive sense until evolutionary theory gave a good explanation. Now we have a better systematic sense of why we rank morality so highly but often "fudge" in the better interests of family, religion, job, or nation.

Morality implies that we reward and punish people in some cases.

Evolved morality requires that some good people require other good people to go along with punishing bad actors (offenders) and rewarding good actors. It is not enough just to be good yourself, you also have to be against bad people and for other good people. Evolved morality requires that some people be self-righteous and moralistic at least sometimes. Self-righteousness and moralistic high-hat can go too far. There is no absolute guideline for how much is enough.

Morality requires rights, responsibilities, and duties. We cannot have rights without responsibilities and duties. We need duties to be moral. I do not go into relations of responsibilities, duties, and rights. Since the 1960s, Americans have stressed rights more than responsibilities, and that has led us astray.

Morality can apply both to acts and ideas (all kinds of mental states and attitudes). We can have morally bad ideas and good ideas. For valid reasons, Western legal systems decided it is better to focus on acts and to not manage ideas through morality. Even so, in our human past we did apply morality both to acts and ideas, and in our daily life outside the legal system we still do. We apply morality to ideas even when we don't expect ideas to lead right away to acts. The term "dirty mind" is a potent moral judgment.

To assess and judge, we need a logic. To make assessments and judgments that work with more than one person, in a community of persons, we also need a logic. Otherwise, people could have no grounds to assert or deny moral judgments, and could not agree or disagree. Morality has a logic. I believe the root logic of morality is the Golden Rule and "applies equally" (with some additions and modifications that do not affect my assertion, and that I discuss elsewhere but not here). I differ from mainstream evolutionary thinking in this point. For that view, see below.

To repeat: there is a difference between knowing about games in general and knowing any particular game. We don't learn games in general; we learn particular games on the basis of knowing about games in general. The basis to learn games is not given to us by society and it is not learned. We are born with the ability to learn games, with which we learn particular games. The same is true of morality. We have a general ability for morality but we do not live general morality or learn a general morality. We learn and live particular styles of morality. The general ability to learn morality evolved. The general ability for morality is not given to us by society, and it is not learned. The general ability to learn particular styles evolved. We do learn the particulars of any given style of morality such as Christian or Taoist morality. Society gives the particulars of a style of morality but does not give us morality as such. The particulars that society gives us can be so important that we overlook our underlying general capacity for morality.

The same is true of religion.

Morality uses facts but morality is not limited to facts. We do not read morality directly from facts. We add moral judgment to facts. Moral judgment and facts are logically distinct. When we see a boy taking apples from a tree we don't know how to assess his actions morally until we know that his grandmother owns the tree and gave him permission or know that the neighbor owns the tree and forbade him. Even if we know that the neighbor forbade him, we might withhold judgment until we know how reasonable it is to forbid neighborhood children from taking apples off a tree when the neighbor does not pick them himself and does not pick up windfalls either.

Morality adds something to facts. Morality adds assessment and judgment.

Facts do play a role along with morality. We need to know who owns the tree and what the owner said about picking apples. Morality cannot be arbitrarily added to any blank fact. Likewise, on the other hand, morality cannot be reduced to a formula about facts. I cannot go into the interplay between morality and facts. What is important here is that moral assessment is logically distinct from facts.

There is a difference between a judgment about a situation versus the drive to do something about the situation, to respond. In common, incorrect, but still useful, terms: there is a difference between logic versus emotion, thought versus action, rationality versus irrationality.

We need both logic and emotion to know what to do, and then do it. In terms of the TV show "Star Trek": Mr. Spock is logical but does not always know what to do and does not always do anything; Dr. McCoy is emotional but does not always know what to do and often does nothing; while Captain Kirk blends logic and emotion, does know what to do, and does it effectively.

Morality not only has passions that drive moral responses, morality has its own distinct passions. When we see right and wrong, we want to do something because we feel moral approval or moral outrage. We do not get angry at a dog getting out of a yard through its own cleverness in the same way that we get angry when the owner does not control the dog, does not secure the yard, the dog gets out, and the dog bites somebody.

Sometimes morality is about a lone right-thinking right-feeling person who has to go against society even at great cost, as in some Classical Greek drama, Classical American Westerns, film noir, detective films, and all police ("cop") movies after about "Bullitt". That case would be important if this book were about morality but here we can overlook it.

More often, people think morality is "prosocial", that morality promotes society; and, in fact, most moral ideas do lead to a better social life. Telling the truth most of the time, not stealing, not cheating, helping others before they ask, helping others when they do ask, and the "Boy Scout Code", really do lead to a better life for the doer and everybody around him-her. If everybody were the Good Samaritan, our world would be better. If everybody could think of nature as our mother and as someone that we have to get along with, this world would be better. Business in the long run would be impossible without business ethics even if in the short run you can make a killing by cheating. This idea that morality is prosocial is how most people explain and justify morality to children.

The link between pro-sociality and morality is at the root of modern controversy about morality. It leads anthropologists to explain morality as an aspect of society. It leads biologists to wonder how evolution, which is rooted in individualistic natural selection, could lead to a strong prosocial force, and to answer that the pro-sociality is only a by-product of individual gain. The confusion over pro-sociality leads both groups to reduce morality to nothing but whatever they think is important. It leads the groups to talk past each other. It leads both groups not to look at morality in itself before giving explanations and reducing morality to nothing but.

On a more personal level, but tied to pro-sociality, are two complementary views of morality. On the one hand, morality is kind. We all know that we behave better, and in many ways more morally, toward our near kin than to strangers. Morally seems to be a version of these feelings, an extension of them. On the other hand, morally sometimes requires us to be stern, as when we have to punish even our own children when they break important rules. The sternness leads to a better family-social group. We can look at the sternness as kindness in disguise ("you have to be cruel to be kind" and "tough love") but it is better to look at it first as simply sternness, as when we spank a child for stealing regardless of what that act might contribute to more efficient family operation in the long run.

At least since Plato argued with Sophists, 400 years before Jesus, it has not been clear if people should be good

- (1) For the sake of goodness in itself.
- (2) Because being good and acting well leads to benefit for the person.
- (3) Because acting well leads to benefit for society.

Personal benefit can be pleasure, satisfaction, other positive feelings, better character, Heaven, a better rebirth, getting along in society, having more useful contacts with people, staying out of trouble, or helping society because you like society.

Plato was unclear on this point, his confusion led him to err, and the errors have lingered in Western thought ever since. For an example of confusion over (a) morality for its own sake versus (b) morality for benefit, listen to the song "Santa Claus is Comin' to town", as in Chapter One. Parents teach children all three rationales for morality. The issue remains unresolved. Just why is honesty the best policy? I come down on the side of doing good for its own sake. It might be necessary to teach children that doing good leads to reward but in the long run that is a dangerous idea.

The issue is important because of the ties to pro-sociality and to conflicts between anthropologists versus biologists. Anthropologists latch on to the explanation that good is for the good of society while biologists use benefit of the individual. To the list above of individual benefits for doing good, biologists add that a person increases his-her reproductive success and so increases long run evolutionary success. Morality is for the good of the self. All other reasons are simply that reason in disguise.

Long before modern controversies about the evolution of morality, thinkers offered theories of morality, usually based on one of the benefits listed above, for individuals or society. An act was moral if it aided that benefit. A judgment was moral if it led people to see a situation so that they would act in ways that promoted one of the benefits listed above. People could feel when an act or judgment promoted one of the benefits listed above, and so would feel that act or judgment was moral. People could feel when an act or judgment went against one of the benefits listed above, and so would feel that act or judgment was immoral. Since about 1800, thinkers have focused on acts and judgments that have to do with society rather than individuals. I don't go through the list, but only mention some examples that, hopefully, get the idea across:

-Stealing is immoral because it disrupts social order, social cohesion, and the sense of social identity. Respecting social status is moral because it promotes order, cohesion, and social identity.

-Morality is entirely a matter of convention, in particular socio-cultural convention. Society invented the idea of morality and society fills up entirely the content of morality. It makes no sense to speak of a moral sense apart from the particular content given by each particular society. This stance implies that morality is not comparable across societies; there can be no general rules of morality.

-Stealing is immoral because it subtracts from the total welfare (food, clothing, security, entertainment, families, housing, religious activity, sports, etc.) of particular individuals, and so subtracts from the total welfare for society as a whole. In contrast, honest purchase is moral because it adds to the total welfare. Think of whether paying for apples rather than stealing them benefits Johnny, Suzy, and Tom individually more than it costs each individually, not only right now, but over their whole lives. Say that buying rather than stealing leads to greater benefit than cost for Johnny and Suzy but to greater cost than benefit for Tom. Still, if the sum of benefits for Johnny and Suzy is greater than the cost to Tom, then, paying is better than stealing, and so paying becomes the moral rule for everybody. If the sum total of the benefits minus the costs for an act, reckoned for each individual, summed over all individuals, is positive, then the act is moral. If the sum total is negative, then the act is immoral. If the sum total for one act is greater than the sum total for another act, then the first act is more moral, than the second act. This vision is the basis for social planning, and has been used to justify quite a few giant sports stadiums.

-Society is not the sum of individuals. Society is greater than the sum of individuals. Still society is about overall benefit, for which we have to figure cost and benefit. We can figure costs and benefits to society directly without going through individuals. If an act, judgment, rule, program, etc. benefits society-as-a-whole then that act etc. is moral. If an act etc. hurts society as a whole, then it is immoral. If one act benefits society more than another act, the first act is more moral than the second act.

-Rather than figure trillions of particular acts, we can reckon in terms of a rule. If a rule against stealing leads to more benefit than cost, we can say the rule is moral and so stealing is immoral. If a rule against lying leads to more cost than benefit, we can say that the rule is not moral even if sometimes it is useful for teaching children or for limited situations. If one rule benefits more than another rule, the first rule is more moral than the second rule. The cost-and-benefit consequences of the rule can be figured for the sum of individuals or for society as a whole. Usually it is easier to figure for society as a whole and then make up rationales about how that also benefits individuals.

Two particular visions (theories) of morality deserve mention, especially because they don't fit into the molds above. Both have influenced me much.

(1) Immanuel Kant is my source for "applies equally". Any rule, to feel moral, must apply to all people equally including you, your kin, your friends, etc. It applies equally to us all because we are persons, and we are not rocks or animals. It is hard to imagine being a person and not wishing such a rule to apply to all persons, at least in theory. A good example is telling the truth. If any rule does apply equally in that way, then it will tend to feel moral. Kant's term for a rule that has to apply to all people because they are sentient beings is "categorical imperative". You see that term often in the literature on morality.

(2) G.E. Moore made a strong case that we should not reduce goodness to any other thing. We should stop trying to explain goodness in any other terms. We cannot understand goodness in any terms other than goodness. We should understand and accept the idea that we do good for goodness itself and not for any other reason. Goodness is its own category. We should think about good in itself. Moore used the term "naturalistic fallacy" for reducing morality to anything else, in particular to any natural thing such as cost and benefit but including ideas such as honor.

It is possible to combine Kant and Moore but I don't try here and a combination of the two is not needed for what I say in this book.

To explain morality properly, I should contrast moral assessments with other assessments such as based on beauty and economics. I can't do that here. I hope to do that in other work.

### **PART 10: Optional: The Darwinian Explanation of Morality.**

This part requires Parts 6 through 9. Especially refer to the last few sections of Part 8, and even more the section on the logic of morality.

When Darwin first applied evolution to humans he was scared by implications for morality and religion. If our senses of morality and religion evolved, and how we actually feel and act under morality and religion follows our reproductive success rather than ideals, then morality and religion could not be about anything real. They are useful delusions, aimed to serve individual reproductive success, and cannot be anything more. Darwin reduced morality and religion to nothing but evolved traits that serve reproductive success like antlers on deer or spots on butterfly wings. I disagree.

Evolutionary scientists carried on Darwin's mistake of reducing to nothing but and explaining away. They did so in how they think about morality as adaptive, how morality might have evolved, and how morality aids success. Below, I retell one of Darwin's examples, and explain how his mistake is carried on. Most evolutionary scientists avoid the issue of what happens if morality is successfully reduced to nothing but. I am not sure what they really think. See the chapter in this book on atheism.

I think most religious people also avoid the issue. They have a feel for the bad that would ensue if we reduced morality to nothing but practical reproductive success, and so they deny evolution is real; deny humans evolved; or accept that humans evolved but deny humans evolved morality and religion, and they assert that God inserted genes for morality and religion into an otherwise evolved proto-human non-moral animal. Or they simply don't deal with the issue.

If we make the mistake of thinking morality can be reduced to nothing but, simply because our capacity for morality evolved, or because what we do follows reproductive success rather than an ideal, we make a fundamental mistake about how the world works. We make a mistake about how persons, evolution, self-determination, and self-government work. We misunderstand ideals.

We severely diminish our hopes for good self-government. It is unlikely any trait that is nothing but can serve as the foundation for persons, morality, and self-government. Even if, through amazing social engineering, some "reduced to nothing but" trait could serve as the basis for democracy, why bother? It would be gilding a clod of dirt. It helps good self-government when we can be secure in believing that persons and morality are real enough.

Morality evolved to serve reproductive success and it still does. Even so, if we reduce morality to nothing but an evolved mechanism to serve reproductive success, then also we make the mistake of thinking that any-and-all ideas that have an evolved basis cannot be about anything real simply because the basis for

the ideas evolved. We wrongly think evolved ideas cannot have a real object and cannot be true. When we make this mistake with morality, we also tend to make it with other ideas such as scientific method.

### **The Darwinian Explanation for Moral Feelings and Acts.**

Assume that we have moral feelings, and don't worry about where they came from or how they relate to other feelings such as hot and cold, and pleasure and pain.

IN THEORY, natural selection can attach any feeling, including moral feeling, to any idea or act, as long as the attaching leads to evolutionary success, that is, to reproductive success. Natural selection can attach the feeling to the degree that gives the best results for evolutionary reproductive success. Natural selection can make sure a feeling does not attach to an act or idea if having that feeling to motivate the idea or act would lead to less success. IN THEORY, natural selection can get us to do or not do, to the right extent, in the same way. Usually a feeling goes along with doing or not doing to the right extent. For example, we find fruit and some nuts sweet but spoiled almonds are bitter and rotten fruit is icky. We like meat more than vegetables but like both better than hunger. Usually we are not afraid of robins. We love all babies including tiger cubs but fear adult tigers. We love babies that look a lot like us more than we love the babies of other people or other species. We are more afraid of big hungry angry nearby bears than of well-fed neighborhood dogs usually confined to their own lawns.

Given that we do have moral feelings, natural selection attaches moral feeling to any act or idea to get us to do the act or think the idea, or not do the act and not think the idea. Natural selection attaches the feeling to the right intensity so that we do the act or think the idea to the right extent. Natural selection makes sure moral feeling does not attach to any act or idea that might harm reproductive evolutionary success. Natural selection made sure we don't attach moral good feelings to people that do not help us achieve practical evolutionary success or that might hinder us. We feel more kind, good, and moral toward our near kin than to strangers because we achieve practical evolutionary success through our kin but not usually through strangers. That is the whole current theory of the natural selection of morality, in a nutshell. For example, we approve of love and duty, but usually approve of love more than duty, yet act more from duty than love. We condemn stealing and incest but usually disapprove of incest more, likely because, when it happens, it leads to more personal, family, and social damage. We get huffier when a stranger steals from us than when our niece steals from us.

This explanation makes sense and is overall true. This account explains how people really use morality, that is, who we treat fairly well, who we treat really well, who we treat badly, who we treat really badly, and when. The neo-Darwinian explanation can give us suggestions for what to do and not do in making a lasting just state. The neo-Darwinian explanation can account for odd cases of strong altruism as when a person saves an unknown drowning child, although I do not explain how. This explanation is well worth keeping.

This explanation also reduces morality and explains it away as nothing but. Just because the explanation is so good at accounting for how we actually use morality it takes all focus away from how morality differs from other features of human nature, what morality might be in itself, and if morality ideally follows a logic even if in practice it bends the logic.

Darwin himself opened the door to thinking about attaching feeling this way and so explaining away morality as nothing but. In an example that became famous, Darwin used bees. A hive has only one queen. If the current queen is young and healthy, and a bee that ordinarily would be a worker begins to grow into another queen, then other worker bees, her nearly-identical sisters, sting her to death. Darwin said, if bees were moral, they would feel justified, righteous, and good about stinging to death their own sisters - as justified, righteous, and good as humans do saving the life of a drowning child or shooting a drug-addled home invader. Natural selection can attach the moral feeling to any idea or act as long as the attachment leads to more success than failure overall. Darwin did not bring up whether the idea or act has to follow the logic of “applies equally” or any logic. In his view, moral logic is not at issue. The question of logic does not come up. Darwin did not think ask whether morality has to pertain only among persons. The question of persons does not come up. Bees are not persons. Darwin did not bring up why bees would need moral feelings so as to be able to sting to death a sister. Apparently bees can figure out practicality without need of morality to urge them on; if bees can do it, then humans can do it too and so should not need morality. But humans do have morality and it is not clear why they need the extra boost to do what bees can do without morality. The only issues for Darwin are act and attached feeling, of applying moral emotion to get animals to do the act or think the idea, and the overall degree of evolutionary (reproductive) success.

Overwhelmingly: Biologists followed Darwin in considering only situations, acts, moral feelings, and cost and benefit; biologists followed Darwin in attaching moral feelings to acts and ideas to get people to do and think idea (or not do and not think); biologists have not considered if morality has to follow a logic even if morality evolved, in particular if morality has to follow the logic of “applies equally”; biologists have not considered the extent to which morality goes with persons – although since about 1985 biologists have taken seriously agents and have made progress in seeing relations between agents and morality. Biologists followed Hume and Darwin but overlooked Kant. Biologists dived into explaining away morality as nothing but practical success, reproductive success, in disguise.

Even so, biologically based analyses have been quite productive and are on-the-whole far more correct than wrong. I write not to undo what biologists have done but to keep people from making the same mistake of explaining away morality as nothing but, of overlooking what morality is and the context in which morality evolved, among evolving persons. We can think that our sense of morality has historical roots in practicality and success, and still intimately tied to practicality and success, without concluding morality itself is nothing but practicality and success. At some point, morality becomes something in itself that we need to respect.

In other work, I assess “attaching feelings to acts and ideas” in more detail.

### **Right and Wrong about the Current Darwinian Account.**

(1) If humans already are so good at judging practicality, that is, what serves reproductive success, then why do we need a strong force such as morality to get us to act practically? Why did we need any force other than practical consideration? Why did we need any force other than practical consideration to overcome cheating to benefit from cooperation? Why do humans need morality if bees don't? I know analyses of irrational commitment. I accept that they are good arguments. I want them made better.

Specifically, we need to pay careful attention to games other than “prisoners’ dilemma” to figure out how morality works to augment considerations of practicality.

(2) Why do we need specifically moral force and feelings? How do the moral feelings that spur moral action differ from other feelings that spur other action such as a taste for sugar, a taste for meat, desire for sex, desire for beauty, and pleasure and pain? Why do we need so many different kinds of feeling? What makes moral feeling distinct from the others?

(3) How did we get specifically moral feelings to begin with? Where did moral feelings originate, and so how did morality originate? Modern Darwinism does offer an account of how morality originated from kin selection (inclusive fitness) and reciprocity; see above. But the account is not fully satisfying. Nobody is sure why humans evolved morality while other animals did not.

(4) I find exhilarating recent studies of the development of morality and the sense of persons in children. I think moral sense and a sense of persons are linked in any naturally evolved sentient being even if they are logically separable. Darwinism could benefit from more consideration of the evolution of the idea of persons, and study of the mutual evolution of the senses of morality and personhood.

(5) If Darwinism could answer these questions, it would be more powerful. Darwinism does not need to answer these questions to show how selective application of morality does serve practical reproductive success. In offering accurate arguments about that, Darwinism can feel it has successfully solved the problem of morality when, in fact, it has solved only one aspect of the problem of morality. So, for the most part, the other questions remain overlooked and unanswered.

(6) Not only did we evolve morality but we also evolved to think morality is really important, morality is real in some way, and morality is linked to the highest levels of the super natural. If the main goal of morality is to promote reproductive success, why is morality reinforced (reified) this way? We don’t need to feel that pleasure and pain are real in the same way we think morality is real, and we don’t need to think they are linked to super natural at any level.

(7) Morality evolved to promote reproductive success. People still use morality to promote reproductive success. We can understand a lot about morality by considering how it promotes success. Exactly the same can be said of pleasure and pain, the taste of food, smells, sight, hearing, sex, strategies for finding food such as hunting and gathering, fighting, sentience, art, and personhood. If all are merely methods to promote reproductive success, what makes them different? What makes them all needed? What is the best way to understand them in themselves? How do we think of them as distinct? What makes each special? This question goes deeper than asking how each evolved at a particular time, and in particular situation, on planet Earth. Moreover, morality seems to be more distinct from, say, the sense of smell, than the sense of touch is distinct from the sense of smell. As long as we think of all them only in terms of methods to serve reproductive success, we can make little sense of this feeling that not only are they distinct but are distinct in different ways. We need better ways to think about the methods that nature evolved, even if we first have to think of them as methods to serve reproductive success.

(8) A handy way to summarize the issue in (7) is to say that Darwinism gives us a good way to see how something works and what it works for, but humans also want to know what something is. Knowing what

something is, is not just a metaphysical quest. Knowing what something is also helps us to know how it evolved, how it works, and how it is distinct from other methods.

Don't dwell too long on the distinction between knowing how something works versus knowing what it is. Western thought has at times emphasized one to the detriment of the other, mistakes followed, and the mistakes became entrenched. The idea of "Being" or "is-ness" has haunted Western thought, as have reactions against the idea of Being. Get the idea of "is" versus "how it works", and see how knowing both points of view helps.

The desire to know what something is, and to think in terms of "is", likely evolved. That does not mean the desire to think in terms of is and to know what something is, is not useful, and does not mean things do not exist simply because our desire to see them in terms of "is" evolved. Again, the source of an idea does not matter, not even that it evolved. Some things exist even though we evolved to think in terms of existence and essence.

(9) Morality really does seem to have a logic, and the logic seems to be the Golden Rule and "applies equally". What does this "having a logic" imply for the evolution of morality? What does this imply for how morality differs from other methods that serve reproductive success such as walking upright?

(10, with 5 repeated) The fact that the questions in (1) and (2) don't need answers to offer explanations based on adaptation and reproductive success makes it too easy to reduce morality merely to practical evolutionary reproductive success, and so intensifies the reduction. We should be suspicious of any reduction that fails to address the questions in (1) and (2).

(10 continued) Many attributes that evolution gave us are merely accidents of the history of evolution on this planet such as the ability to breathe oxygen, fly in rarified gas (air), and walk on two legs on solid ground. In contrast, some abilities lead us to perceive things that would exist even if humans never evolved, and to follow some of them. We perceive light, the sun, and the octave, and we follow scientific method. We need to decide which of these options morality is, and what that means.

We do gain by looking at morality as merely a method to serve reproductive success, and as a thing for which we evolved a capacity to imagine as real - but what do we lose? We lose appreciation for the logic of morality, the force of "applies equally" and the Golden Rule. We lose appreciation for morality as what we should follow as much as we can. We lose the feeling of morality as something apart from people, with its own being, and greater than people. We lose a chance to know any ties between morality and the super natural, including God.

### **Giving Darwinism a Needed Break.**

I am a Darwinist. I do not criticize Darwinism to negate it but to make it better, especially for well-rounded people who want to place Darwinism and themselves in a bigger context.

For reasons that I can't go into here, science rightfully cannot accept the super natural into explanations. This rule is a strength of science. The view I take of morality leads me toward the super natural even if my view does not require the super natural. So Darwinists are correct to be leery of my criticism if they

feel it leads inevitably to the super natural. They have to decide how much they have to deal with without being forced into the super natural.

If Darwinism cannot settle the issues raised above, such as the reality status of morality, and cannot admit the super natural into scientific arguments, then what is the proper path for Darwinism? The proper path is what Darwinists have done. The proper path is to see how morality is used, and not used, to promote reproductive success. Once Darwinists have more and better information on that topic, then they can worry about the other issues. Darwinism applied to humans is still young enough as a science so that it should focus on how morality is used and not worry so much about what morality is or about some of the other issues raised above.

On the other hand, Darwinists should not think every attempt to place Darwinism in a bigger setting is necessarily a critique of evolutionary theory and of the idea that evolutionary theory applies to humans. Some of us believe that humans evolved, including morality, and want to understand not only how that happened, and how it works now, but what it means. To understand how humans and morality evolved, we have to consider at least some of what morality is as well as how morality is used.

### **What I Want.**

I want to have my cake and eat it too. Usually I dislike wanting to have your cake and eat too but in this case not only can I get away with it but it is the best attitude.

-I want to keep the Darwinian account of how morality works and how it might have arisen, and keep the traditional sense that morality is almost uniquely important, morality is bigger than humans, and is real.

-I want to keep the Darwinian account of how morality works and also think about what morality is.

-I want to know why we have the ideal of morality but apply it selectively. Darwinism is very good at offering an answer to this question.

-Even though I see why we do not live up to moral ideals, I also want to keep morality as an ideal for me, and I want to work hard to make a better world.

-I want to believe that moral logic (Golden Rule and “applies equally”) conveys the ideal of morality and constrains even real evolved morality but also that natural selection often does not fulfill moral logic and sometimes does an end run around moral logic.

-I want not to reduce morality to “nothing but” anything including nothing but evolutionary reproductive success and nothing but society.

-I want to keep what we gain from seeing that we are moral but we are not perfectly moral.

To repeat: Just because we evolved the ability for something does not mean that our ideas about that thing are nothing but evolved useful delusions, and does not mean that thing is necessarily unreal. We can evolve true ideas about true real things, even non-material things such as morality.

Just because something is non-material and real, and evolution gives us an ability to see it and follow it, does not mean evolution will lead us to see it completely clearly and follow it fully. We see real material things such as forests but we hardly know everything relevant about them and we don't treat them as well as we should even for our own welfare. Our evolved ability for geometry falls short of ideal geometry but that does not mean we don't do any geometry, and falling short of the ideal because we evolved the ability to see the ideal makes sense of the fact that some people are adept while others are not. The fact that how we follow morality can be explained by evolutionary theory does not debunk that morality exists. It means the capacity for morality evolved in the context of serving practical evolutionary reproductive success. We do not follow scientific method perfectly either but that does not mean scientific method is merely an evolved delusion.

We can have both ideal morality and real morality if we think morality is real but that we also evolved a capacity to see morality and to follow it as much as practical evolutionary success allows. Morality does exist apart from humans or any evolved sentient beings. Evolution led us to see and to follow something that is non-material yet still real apart from us, morality. Morality is not a thing evolution merely invented as just another organ like fly wings. Moral logic does constrain real evolved morality. Our evolved ability to follow morality falls short because it is an evolved ability. Falling short is what we should expect even if morality is real.

We cannot use morality and persons as the basis for real democracy unless we do see morality as both real and evolved, unless we see both the ideal and how we really act. Unless we see real and evolved, ideals and real acts, we will constantly confuse real and ideal, and will constantly make bad policies and programs.

I think evolutionary biology so far has done an outstanding job of going after morality. Biologists do tend to get misled by the idea that morality is nothing but an evolved delusion, and frightened by their own train of logic, but that is a chance we take when we think hard. Besides the classics in moral philosophy, any person interested in knowing about morality should read works on the biology of morality.

To improve understanding of morality, I have some suggestions:

-If you are a religious person, don't worry that modern Darwinism has explained away morality and God. Appreciate how well modern Darwinism explains what people really are like and what people really do. Use knowledge about what people really are like and really do to get people to act better and be better. Don't base your work on unrealistic ideologies.

-If wish to make democracy work, pay attention to what biologists say about human nature in general and human moral nature in particular. The best source for wisdom is still the past but wisdom from the past goes along well with what biology tells us. Use what you know of human nature, and learn about human nature, to design good laws and good programs. Use it to understand how capitalism really works and real capitalism affects social and class relations.

-If you approach these issues from modern Darwinism:

=Stop taking pride in the possibility that evolutionary theory explains away morality and religion. Instead, pay attention to how theory explains what people actually do, sheds light on how morality evolved, or on what a person is and how persons might have evolved.

=Think about how moral feelings differ from other feelings. Why do we need so many feelings?

=Think whether morality follows a logic. Can moral feelings really attach willy-nilly to any act or idea even among evolved persons? Is there a pattern to how moral feelings attach other than to serve reproductive success? If morality does follow a logic, what is that logic?

=Think about how ideals work in human life, how they might have evolved, and why we need so many ideals.

=Step back and, as a person, wonder if morality might be real and what that might imply.

=Read my chapter on atheism later in the book.

## 04 Some Issues 1

My basic stance always is Jesus' message mixed with realism and with Western values about freedom, citizenship, and science. If religion was so simple, this book would not be needed. Real questions arise. Many real questions are asked first by children, go unanswered, and then get lost in life's rush: "Can God make a rock so heavy he can't lift it?" "Can God do bad things?" It is worth asking again every once in a while. The point of asking here is to get past the questions in an adult way, use common sense, and get on to better issues. This chapter and the next pose some questions so we can sort things out to focus on what is important.

People pestered the Buddha about heaven, hell, next lives, karma, power, food, having energy, losing weight, looking good, being cool, being a "gangsta", love, winning the lotto, erectile dysfunction, vaginal dryness, etc. He refused to answer because those issues blocked the main task, which was to wake up, see how the world works, stop clinging, and stop suffering. Some questions can help with the main task, but, even then, mostly we ask them to get past them. "Getting past them" does not mean dismissing them as we do for a small child but letting them trigger our sense of wonder and using them to think.

### **PART 1: Childhood Questions**

#### **God, Goodness, and More than Morality.**

Are God and good the same or do they differ? Is goodness good because it is good in itself or is it good because God has a list of good things? Is goodness good only because God said so? Does goodness have logic? Does all goodness have something in common or do we merely have a list that we learned in childhood? Does God have to conform to the logic of morality? Can goodness judge itself? Could God have had Jesus teach a different message? Would something now good, such as the Golden Rule, be bad if God said so? Could the Golden Rule be bad on another world? Would something now bad, such as eating children, be good if God said so? Is God intrinsically, only, and always good? Could God will bad? Does God allow bad? Could God approve what is bad in the service of greater good? If God told us to do something bad, should we do it? Can goodness judge God? You can ask the same questions about Dharma and Tao.

I find it hard to think God and goodness are not the same. Yet God seems other than, and bigger than, my simplistic morality. God is bigger than the message of Jesus, so acting well is not all that the world is about, and acting well is not enough. Then what? Job, C.S. Lewis (in "Till We Have Faces"), Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, and most mysticism, just fall back on the inscrutable grandeur of a God beyond morality. Why not just accept what the world has to bring even if some of it is bad?

I have no response to any difference between God and good. I would not do something bad because God told me to. I would not do something bad because some human told me it is God's will. "God's will" is never a valid reason to do anything bad.

It is hard to follow a way of life that accepts both the bad and the good equally. It is hard to be neutral. Not even philosophies that say they do this really do it. It is hard to go along with badness. We want to fight badness. We do not like when people gain from badness. If we stop fighting badness, badness will win: Edmund Burke: "All it takes for the victory of evil is that good people do nothing". To fall back on the grandeur of a God beyond good and evil is like letting evil run wild; it is not to act godlike. God can turn much badness into goodness. Still, we don't like depending on God to do that for us and depending on God to turn the tide of goodness over badness. That idea sounds like an excuse for badness.

So we seek simple moral ways to live. In doing so, we might as well blend simple morality with the best religion.

It does not matter if our dislike of badness has a basis in our evolution; it is still there; it is as likely true as not; it works in us; we have to act on it; and we have to figure out what it means.

If we live by principles, we might as well have a good moral set of ideas that support the principles. The teaching of Jesus is the best place to start. No matter where you go from there, you need to keep Jesus' morality as a reference base. Even people who break rules on purpose keep his morality as a stable reference to know what they are reacting against.

Moralities imply religions even if moralities do not specify religions exactly. The morality of Jesus implies a religion based on one very smart good God. Even though Jesus was idealistic, and even if he wrongly expected a Kingdom of God, the religion that Jesus held seems reasonable and correct. If we accept the moral principles of Jesus it is reasonable to accept his ideas about one very smart good God. I am glad the morality of Jesus and the religion of one good God go together. I don't see any other religion that works as well with Jesus' morality.

### **More on Goodness and Badness.**

My naive simplistic ideas about goodness cannot be the whole story. A lot in life has little to do with good or bad, such as cooking, going to work every day, art, science, sunsets, comets, elephants, rain, snow, and allergies. Life is as much about those as about moral stands. Nature has badness in it, as when spider babies eat their own siblings. The capacity for morality evolved through self-interest, selfishness, competition, and even unfair competition. Morality arose indirectly because people in our evolutionary past worked for their families, friends, and group mates rather than directly for goodness. Morality evolved partly as a response to amorality and immorality, and it could not have evolved unless animals and people acted badly often enough. Good intentions often cause more harm than good in the end: "the road to hell is paved with good intentions". People often achieve more goodness when they act out of love for family, friends, and group than when they act directly for goodness; appeals to family, friends, and group are more likely to get people to act well than direct appeals to goodness. People acting in self-interest still often lead to more good than people who aim to do good, as in examples from economics when bakers, car makers, and the Los Angeles Lakers, all seeking profit, give people usefulness (utility), and usually give more usefulness than a moralist preacher or PC person. By the time humans figured out that they needed to take care of the planet, and how to take care of the planet, it was too late already. It seems God tolerates badness on the way to creating goodness, and-or God must go through badness on the way to making goodness.

First, although the world is bigger than my naïve moral ideas, still I can't have better principles on which to act. I have to use my naïve morality as the basic guideline, even when I allow for practicality. At the same time, I have to be humble. I have to avoid zealotry. I keep my eyes open to learn about what is in the world along with my simple morality.

Second, acting morally and being a good person does not stop me from doing the other interesting things in life. You don't have to be moralistic all the time. Most of the time, you can enjoy life without worrying about moral fallout. If you do worry about morality all the time, then something is wrong, and you need to re-assess. Proper morality should encourage people to create, do science, smell roses, admire sunsets, ride a motorcycle, eat, and enjoy life. In the long run, much more than morality, badness is likely to get in the way of life.

Third, we have to avoid the mistaken, misleading, bad stance that good and bad are metaphysical twins that need each other. We don't need badness to make life more interesting. Nature, accident, and the legitimate struggles of life provide enough problems that require goodness so that we don't have to add badness to get goodness. Storms, disease, car accidents, failure in business, and disappointment in love and family all provide enough need for goodness so we don't have to go looking for badness to round out goodness. Bad people do enough bad things on their own without encouragement or rationalization. We do appreciate goodness more after fighting badness but that does not mean we need great evil to have true goodness. It does not mean we need badness to fight with so we can have any goodness at all. It does not mean the more badness we have, the more goodness we have too. We cannot seek goodness through badness. Badness is not a positive thing in itself like the wind or like goodness. We do not act like God when we act badly. We do not gain more freedom, and we do not act like God, when we break rules for fun and when we do what we want.

Fourth, the fact that the world is bigger than simplistic moralizing does not mean: simple moral relativism is true; sophisticated moral relativism is true; all judgments are relative; all principled judgments are false; all judgments are both true and false; and we can do whatever we want if we find an excuse. Right and wrong still are, and are still important. We have to use judgment. Judging means right and wrong still are relevant; it means there is something to judge. Of course, we should be cautious about using absolutes and about thinking we are right all the time. All this is hard, but it is what has to be.

Fifth, badness can be fun sometimes, more fun than goodness. Goodness can be boring. Badness can alleviate the boredom of goodness. Not facing up to this simple truth leads people into badness. It is like telling people that all drugs are all bad all the time; then, when people try a drug that really isn't very bad such as "pot", they lose their judgment and get into drugs that really are bad such as "meth". When people hear that badness is hurtful all the time, and then find it isn't, they fall into the reverse mistake and romanticize badness. The truth leads to better judgment than do simple platitudes. Although badness is fun at times, badness still is not a good idea, and badness still does not add enough to goodness to make badness worthwhile. I return to the topic in several later places in the book, in particular in the chapters on Romanticism and on decency.

I can imagine great badness, greater than anything most people have met, greater than a child getting cancer. The Stalinist terror and the "Borg" on the TV show "Star Trek TNG" are mild examples. I do not

describe such badness. I doubt such badness consistently leads to greater goodness. Some badness is so bad that we can't respond with more goodness, and the badness would crush us. Some badness would take away our humanity. Luckily, we don't face such badness yet. Hopefully, we will avoid it in the future. We should think now so that we don't face it in the future.

The badness we do face does stimulate a lot of goodness in us without also crushing us. Badness does crush some people, but, really, not many. Most of us get by. I don't know if God planned the world so as to force us to face just the right kinds of badness, in just the right amounts, so as to stimulate the greatest goodness in us, without often crushing us. Gottfried Leibnitz suggested this idea; he said we live in "the best of all possible worlds". Voltaire, made great fun of it in the wonderful short book "Candide". I don't know how to measure goodness and badness, and how to assess this idea. I doubt this idea is true. I side with Voltaire. Things turned out as they did in this world, and most of us can stand most of what we have to stand, but not all of us can stand all of what we have to. Some of us get unlucky; that is part of the reality of life; see below. I do not speculate more on this question.

Some religions, such as some Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, urge people to go beyond conventional morality. Sometimes they seem to scoff at all morality. They do not really. They take for granted deep basic morality such as sympathy and empathy. They dislike zealotry and dislike people falling back on merely external rules when people should use judgment and intuition. They do not prefer bad to good. They do not say people are realer, more spiritual, successful, or godlike when people act badly than when people act well. They do not say people are freer when people act badly or break rules. They make clear that going against deep morality is another mistake and another bondage to external artificial principles. I largely agree with the Taoist view of morality but I still emphasize correct principles and I still adhere to my naïve morality.

The idea that we should work hard to make the world better can be an irrational obsession. It has fueled both selfless hard work and zealotry. It can support both satisfaction and guilt. It has led people both to clear minds and to confusion. In the West, and among Christians, too often it is an obsession that leads people to impose their ideas of goodness and order; and, when they do not succeed as they had hoped, to feel oppressive guilt. People outside the West and Christianity often see the idea as an annoying cult-like obsession, and see Western do-gooders as interfering screw-up busy-bodies who serve their own desperate need for justification more than true good. Wishing to make the world better is more a way of getting along personally, a game, than actually doing good in the world. While the bad parts of the obsession are true, the good parts of the dedication are true as well, and I think the good outweighs the bad. All I can advise is that we keep aware of the bad parts, clear our heads as much as possible, and actually try to do some good. Seek to do good rather than to feel better and feel justified.

### **The Problem of Evil.**

We can tolerate a little badness such as getting a cold before a big date. We can tolerate a little evil such as getting cheated on by a girlfriend or boyfriend as long as we don't have children together. We can't tolerate, or understand, some evil, and why there is so much evil. Why should a child get sold into sex slavery? Why do so many people and business firms want state support? Why does God tolerate hard evil or so much evil? Does God actually promote some evil? Even if God uses the evil to make greater

good, how can God promote evil? This chapter does not look at badness and evil. See a later chapter. There are no definitive answers.

### **Other Religions.**

I never felt I had to hold all the ideas in any one religion, had to hold any one religion to the exclusion of all others, and had to deny all the ideas in all religions other than “my” religion. Always it was a matter of ideas. We keep good ideas while dumping bad ideas. We do not desperately hold one religion and all its points regardless of value while excluding all other religions and all their points regardless of value. Childhood Christianity “took” in me but my version never excluded ideas from other religions. I never felt wrong about learning from other religions. I got joy from it. I never learned to exclude and condemn. One religion does not necessarily exclude ideas from others. We do not exclude religions, we exclude bad ideas, and we do that from all religions. I could feel this way and still not feel I was “straying from God” or lapsing into the idolatry that the Tanakh (Old Testament) condemns.

I saw that not all ideas in all religions were equally valid or could be. Religions contradict. All religions have some bad ideas, and all religions are bad when they assume their own superiority without good reasons.

## **PART 2: Lingering Theological Issues**

### **Jesus’ Secret Successes.**

Standard Christianity argues that Jesus succeeded in saving people simply by being born on Earth as a man, being crucified, and being resurrected. For two thousand years, Christian theologians have tried to explain how that works. They failed. We need to look at Jesus in other ways. In their view, their failure does not mean the idea is false, it only means we mere humans don’t understand. We might not have to understand the idea for it to work; we only have to believe. I leave that issue aside.

Even if Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection can save people, it is not likely they can save people if people simply believe but are not also good. According to the New Testament, demons know Jesus is God and has saved the world but it does them no good because they will not submit and do good. If people are good according to the message of Jesus, then it is not clear that they also have to believe in the magic of standard Christian dogma. The magic impresses on us how much God loves us. If we can see that anyway, then we might not need the magic.

“To carry on Jesus’ message, it is likely that people had to believe Jesus was God and had to believe in the magical ability of the incarnation, death, and resurrection. Jesus’ message did go on. It is hard to believe God would deceive us about the magic of Jesus just so we would carry the message. So, it makes sense that the magic of Jesus is true. To avoid deceiving us, God allowed that Jesus was God, and God sent himself as Jesus here to Earth. That way, we can avoid the idea that God deceived us or allowed us to be deceived. Thus the magic of Jesus is real and it worked.” While appealing, I doubt this argument is true. It makes more sense that God did let us deceive ourselves because that is the only way we stupid silly humans would promote the message of Jesus hard enough and long enough for it to stick. Even if the above argument is true, as long as I follow the message, I don’t have to worry about it

because God will not judge me mostly according to whether I believe in Jesus' magic, and so I do not to accept the argument above.

Jesus wanted to set up the ideal Kingdom of God but apparently failed. This apparent failure also bothers theologians, and they have found ways to say Jesus really succeeded in setting up a kingdom although it appears he failed.

Rather than a Kingdom of God like what Jesus had in mind, Christian theologians argue that the Kingdom is the Church, at least until Jesus comes again. If you join the Church, believe, and act well, then you are in the Kingdom of God. If you don't join the Church, then you are not in the Kingdom even if you act well and, apparently, even if you believe in the magic of Jesus. There is something about the magic of Jesus that requires a Christian church. I have nothing against churches of any religion; they do more good than bad; they can do a lot of good; most people are happier if they belong to some religious group; and I hope everybody finds the right church for them. But, like many Western Americans, I don't think it is necessary.

What if the Kingdom of God is not a Kingdom as the Jews thought but a Kingdom based on attitude? What if the Kingdom of God is inside you, as a passage in the New Testament says? This is not a bad idea. It impressed me when I was young. It is important to have the right attitude and the right relation with God. Even if the rest of the world goes bad, if you have the right attitude, and the right relation with God, then you are alright.

I do not dispute the importance of a good attitude but I don't think that is only what Jesus had in mind or primarily what he had in mind. Jesus really did want the Kingdom of God as foretold by the prophets, and as modified by his ideas about good behavior and citizenship. He did not have in mind only a kingdom of individuals with the right attitude, not even in the same Church. He did not have in mind a therapy group. He wanted us to act well and to set up communities based on decency and decent acts.

Suppose a few people do have the right attitude but the world goes bad anyway. Tyranny runs the world, nature decays, and the world looks like a garbage pit. Then, having the right attitude will be an enormous comfort but it will be a hollow victory. It will not be success as Jesus hoped. If that is all we can get, then we should take it; but don't mistake it for the Kingdom of God as what Jesus hoped and as what we might have achieved. The Church cannot make up for that failure.

Suppose the world does go right, and it goes right largely because of Jesus' message. Whether people become Christians or not, people in general adopt the institutions begun in the West as a result of Jesus' message, build working democracies, and save the environment. Is this not the Kingdom of God, or at least a decent substitute? In this case, didn't Jesus succeed anyway? I don't argue for or against this idea of Jesus' secret success. If it works, I will simply enjoy it.

**Purity of Motive: Good for Goodness' Sake.**

The old Christmas song "Santa Claus is Comin' to Town" says (quoting from memory):

"You better watch out, you better not pout  
You better not shout, you better not cry

I'm tellin' you why  
Santa Claus is comin' to town...  
He sees you when you're sleeping  
He knows when you're awake  
He knows when you've been bad or good  
So be good for goodness' sake"

The omniscience of Santa Claus is the omniscience that priests give to God, parents borrow, and parents use to scare children into behaving.

The last line is ironic. If you act out of fear, and hope for a reward, you don't act for goodness' sake. If you do something good because you want a reward, is it still good? Do you still deserve the reward? Should you still get the reward? If you act well because you want to come off well when you meet God, does that work? If you act well because you want to go to heaven, do you still deserve to go? Can you just act well without also thinking about it? Can you act well without any reason, not even for the sake of acting well? If you act well for the sake of acting well rather than just acting well without any reason, is that still acting well? There are no simple answers. This is what I have in mind when I say that we need to use ideologies without being bound by them. Remember this dilemma for the later chapter on codes, Taoism, and Zen.

Total purity of motive rarely exists in humans. We are morally mixed. Morality arose out of self-interest and nearly always served self-interest. We still act out of a mixture of genuine morality and self-interest. Morality and self-interest coincide nearly all the time - "honesty is the best policy" - so usually we don't have to worry too much about the mix. Trying to separate them would be like trying to take the wet out of water. We do not necessarily fault people for imperfect purity. Nobody faults a firefighter, police officer, or soldier for drawing a salary.

The real question here is not purity of motive but using morality primarily as a tool while expecting to get away with it. To act on mixed motives is only human. A little moral manipulation is only human. A lot of moral manipulation is bad even if moral manipulation is still only human. People used moral manipulation while human nature evolved, and it goes along with having an evolved sense of morality. It is part of our human nature. Our ancestors also got caught doing it, and then catchers were usually more adept than the deceivers. So now usually we can tell when somebody is being too manipulative, and, if the issue is important, we call them on it. We assess the best we can.

In theory, God can tell the exact mixture of pure morality, self-interest, and manipulation. I don't know if he really can or if he even bothers. I doubt God demands total purity. God has his own criteria. I don't know how God assess these situations but I don't worry about it.

### **Bad Feelings.**

Not needing purity of motive includes not needing purity of emotions. Nobody has only sweet kind good emotions. Nobody but bizarre saints always forgive from the bottoms of their hearts. People who seem to have only pure good hearts usually are lying. People who really do have pure good hearts are hard to be around. We all have mixed emotions. We all want to mangle somebody sometimes. We all carry a

grudge for a while. Sometimes we derive strength from our “bad” emotions. We channel that power to act better or to avoid acting badly. We can turn bad emotions to good use without becoming insipid and boring, and without using our apparent kindness as a secret cover for passive aggression.

In a famous “Star Trek” episode, Captain Kirk splits into a “good” Kirk and a “bad” Kirk. The good Kirk is indecisive and ineffective. The bad Kirk is decisively selfish. When the two combine, the real Kirk is decisive and effective about acting well. That does not make the real Kirk an insipid boring guy. In the TV series “Burn Notice”, when he was young, the hero, Mike, was beaten by his alcoholic father. In one episode, Mike discovers that, all his life, without knowing it, he had used the anger at his father to get him through hardships, and he had used the memory of his father’s treatment of his brother and mother not to do the same. He had used the memory of one time when he did hurt some innocent people never to do it again. The fact that good motives dominated bad emotions did not make Mike a nice sweet insipid boring guy either before he consciously knew how his mind works or after.

God knows how we evolved and what makes us tick. God feels anger and wrath himself. He seems able to channel his anger mostly toward long-range good outcomes, and so he must take our mixed emotions into account when assessing us.

### **Free Will.**

I have no solution to the question of free will. Because people worry about it, I take it up again in a later chapter. For now: The question of free will is like the question of purity. We have neither totally free will in all situations nor are we always totally determined like a simple machine. We have situational free will. We are free enough for most situations, and free enough for most situations that come up for this book.

Contrary to ideal free will, sometimes our will is not free; that is what “duress” means. Only a fool thinks you can be free while someone squeezes your fingers with pliers or holds a cigarette to your child’s eye. On the one hand, according to biology, even when we think our will is free, we might still be machines operating under a delusion of freedom. The delusion evolved to help us succeed. When we give in to the manipulations of loved ones, we still call it free will. On the other hand, people freely act against their own success: people walk into burning buildings to save strangers, give up a throne for love and for the good of the country, and support an aged sickly dying parent. Children have their own minds and try hard to assert their freedom. Between mechanical slavery versus the perfect freedom of martyr’s fancy, we have workaday free will. How free our will is, varies by situation. When not fooled by ideology, we are skilled at assessing how free a person might be in particular situations. For law, politics, social relations, personal relations, and religion, all to work properly, we have to assume our will is largely free in those situations where we expect it to be free enough. That seems to be true.

### **You Don’t Have to be Perfect.**

Just as you need not have total purity of motive and totally free will, so you don’t have to be perfect in act and thought. Nobody is perfect, so if God demands perfection, we are all doomed. I don’t know how flawed you can be and still be decent. I don’t know if good trades off with bad. I don’t know if trying extra hard to make a better world can balance a nagging flaw such as addiction to Internet shopping or Internet porn. Some flaws are serious, and cannot be overlooked by other people regardless of what God thinks;

see below. I don't know if God is kinder to people who are better than average or show unusual talent. From what I have seen, those are the people who least expect favors. All religions say their founders approached, or reached, perfection. That is silly. Not Abraham, Moses, the Buddha, Jesus, Mohammad, Confucius, or Chuang Tzu were perfect, not even as a prophet - let alone if we add their character flaws. I don't point out their flaws to prove my point.

### **Everybody Is Not the Same.**

American society makes excuses for bad, foolish, and inept people. To see them falsely, as saints-in-the-making, clouds our judgment. It makes us over-value stupidity and indecency. It makes us under-value decent, smart, and adept people. Making excuses warps religion, politics, and society. Because society has distorted this question, I take it up in a later chapter on decency. For now:

To say everybody is not just as good as everybody else goes against current American "PC" culture in which everybody is as good as everybody else, we all get rewards, everybody is a winner, nobody is a loser, and everybody does as well as everybody else. This American delusion is simply not true. Enough good movies have been made poking fun at it so we would know it is not true if we were not clouded by silly ideology.

We are all equal under the law, and should be equal under the law. That is much different than saying we are all equally adept at everything, equally good, and equally valuable.

Although we are not equal in worldly abilities and worldly affairs, we might all be just as good in the eyes of God. We are all human, and all valuable to God. Differences in natural abilities do not impress God much. Except for some mentally ill people and people under duress, we all can choose to be decent or bad. We are all about equally worth "saving". We are all about equally "saveable".

That is true, but, even so, now we have to accept something Americans reject: There really are bad people, louts, and assholes. Some people are dirty, loud, stink, are selfish, liars, thieves, obnoxious, irresponsible, uncooperative, troublesome, and cheaters. None of the usual excuses are acceptable for them, such as a hard life, romantic rebellion, or being in an oppressed minority.

Although, on one level, in potential, people are similar in the eyes of God, on the level of choosing to be good and acting well, or choosing to be bad and acting badly, people clearly differ in the eyes of God. If you are a bad person, God does not see you the same as good people. God does not see you as you wish to see yourself. God does not see you as you fool yourself into seeing. God does not see you as your dog wishes to see you. God might see that, inside, you had the potential to be good. But God also pays attention to what you actually choose and what you actually do. When you choose to be bad, and you act badly, then you are not the same person as the potentially good person. You really are what you really are. Eventually you are what you do. God sees that. He sees your outside as well as your inside. He does not see you in the same way as he sees a flawed person really trying hard to be good.

For mere humans here on this world, it does not matter much how God sees bad people. What matters is how bad people act and the results on good people. Just because we all had about equal potential in the eyes of God does not mean we can treat each other exactly the same. We have to respect differences in

ability, effort, outcome, responsibility, decency, and badness. We have to beware of bad people. We cannot treat assholes as saints just because God knows they had a good person buried in them and they might change their hearts. We can start by doing as Jesus said. We can give people the benefit of the doubt until they prove otherwise; we can follow the Golden Rule. We can try to look on people as God sees them until they make us change our minds and force us to protect ourselves.

### **Saved and Wasted.**

By “saved” I do not mean the Christian idea of “saved” or the Hindu-Buddhist idea of “enlightened”; by “wasted” I do not mean “damned” or “not enlightened”.

The following idea was one of the highest hurdles I had to jump in growing up. On the one hand, some people see the message of Jesus, and try to live it. They succeed spiritually even if they don't save the world. They are “saved”. On the other hand, some people really do fail. They are wasted people. I have seen too many bad people now to think all people will die as good people, in this lifetime or any number of lifetimes. I would like to think everybody gets saved eventually but I don't. Some people are wasted.

You do not have to be smart to be saved. You don't have to understand all the ideas in this book. You can be a simple decent person by nature with little understanding of dogma, and be saved. All you have to do is act according to Jesus' message as best you can. Being saved does not mean you go to heaven automatically. Being saved has no gain other than that you will have a comfortable talk with God when you die.

You are not wasted because your life has failed, you did not succeed in your business or profession, your marriage failed, your kids are jerks, you never lived up to your promise, your friends dumped you, people used you, you are sick, you are addicted, or you can't find a job. You are not wasted because you are homeless, eat at soup kitchens, or buy all your stuff at thrift stores. You are not wasted because you take the bus. You just have a hard life.

You are wasted because you have a bad attitude, act badly, and choose to act badly. You can rationalize all you want, but, if you have a bad attitude and-or act badly, you are wasted.

In between saved and wasted is a large middle ground. Most people think they fall in the middle ground but are sure God will cut them a big break when they die. God is a pretty good guy but still I doubt he will treat normal wishy-washy self-centered people as well as he treats simple decent people and people who get it. But I don't know for sure.

Along the same lines, another high hurdle I had in growing up was accepting that some cultures-social-groups are better and some are worse. Some cultures-social-groups have a good useful attitude while some have a bad hurtful attitude. Wasted people tend to come from groups with bad attitudes although they can come from any group. This topic is contentious and anti-politically-correct. Rather than go into it here, I go into it in bits and pieces throughout the book.

### **No Magic or Superstition but Still Morality and One Supernatural Being.**

I hold to morality. I want to believe in God but I want as little superstition and magic as possible, including no Devil, few miracles, no magic of Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection, and no ghosts, vampires, demons, spirits, mediums, or magic intuition. Yet God is supernatural. It seems a fine line between God the supernatural versus magical claptrap.

Admirable Christians such as C.S. Lewis believed in Christian magic and openly called it magic without shame. Great theologians such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas offered strong logical arguments for the reality of Christian magic. I likely could screw myself up to believe some of the Christian magic such as the resurrection but I don't need to and don't want to.

If I believe in Christian magic, then I have to believe in most of the magic of all the other major religions including Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism. There are few good reasons for believing in the magic of one while denying the magic of others. I doubt even Thomas Aquinas really pulls that off. I don't want to believe in that much magic. It is too much overload.

If I believe in Christian magic and some of the magic of other religions, then I have to argue over "regular" magic and superstition such as ghosts, spirits, animal spirit companions, witches, demons, the Devil, etc. I have to bicker about sensible magic and silly magic. I want to avoid that entirely. The best way to avoid it entirely is to avoid the magic even in mainstream major religions.

The benefit of belief in God and the message of Jesus can be had without the downside of dealing with magic and superstition. I can hold the line at "one supernatural with one good God and his prophets, including especially Jesus", without having to accept magic and superstition; so I do.

### **Acting Well Regardless of God.**

Here it is worth repeating: On the one hand, we meet God when we die, and we act well partly so we can come out well when we face God. On the other hand, we should do well whether we face God or not. God does not require purity of motive. God does not require us to act well only purely because we act well and not because we want to look good when we meet him. Still, God prefers we act well because we act well. God wants us to do the right things for the right reasons. God does not want us to be terrified of him or to act on the basis of terror. This situation does not feel like a contradiction to me. This feeling of acting well for its own sake yet still respecting God is similar to the feeling of Taoist and Zen adepts who just act without thinking too much yet always also follow the Tao or the Dharma.

### **Acting Well; God seems Redundant.**

If we want to get rid of as much magic and superstition as we can, and if we act well because we act well and not out of fear of God, then the idea of God seems like too much. We don't need God. If you get morality, then you don't need God, Tao, or Dharma. You can get rid of magic and the supernatural yet keep morality. Atheists stress this point. I don't argue here; see the chapter on atheism where I explain why keeping the idea of God makes sense. Again, I do not feel this situation as a contradiction. We can draw the line between magic and superstition on the one hand versus God and morality on the other. We don't have to draw the line with magic, superstition, and God on one hand versus morality on the other hand.

Accepting morality, God, a sense of imagination, and a sense of wonder, does not mean I have to accept magic and superstition. Being rational and reasonable does not mean I have to get rid of morality, God, wonder, or imagination. I can even accept magic in fiction, which I do wholeheartedly. I do not believe in ghosts, witches, wizards, demons, or any other superstition "for real". I think respecting morality opens the door inevitably to thinking about God. If we want morality, then we have to think about God even if we don't accept God, and we have to accept the right of other people to believe in God. That is why we can put morality and God together while leaving out magic and superstition.

### **God's Will.**

When somebody claims to know God's Will, yet his-her idea of God's Will goes against common sense, morality, simple decency, or science, or when doing God's will hurts another group, then that person very likely is wrong and does not know God's Will. Terrorists do not know God's Will. At this time in history, no one religion knows God's Will better than any other. Not Jews, Christians, Muslims, nor Hindus know God's Will better than the others; adept Buddhists and Taoists would not argue in these terms. People claim to know God's Will as a way to get other people to do what they want. People claim to know God's Will as a way to promote their own agenda.

There is a place for God's Will. It is easy enough for people to say God's Will and morality always are the same and that the combination is obvious; but reality says otherwise. Too often, morality is not clear. Morality has contradictions, as the debates over torturing terrorists for information make obvious. The world is bigger than my simplistic morality, all simplistic morality, and even bigger than all complicated sophisticated morality. Even though morality is not always clear, and morality does not cover all points in contention, we still need to decide issues, sometimes right away. Then people appeal to God's help and God's Will. When God's Will decides an issue so we can move on, and God's Will leads to more good than harm, then fine. In fact, then maybe what happened really is God's Will and is not just a ploy by somebody seeking his-her own benefit. When God told Moses to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt toward Israel, maybe that really was God's Will and not just Moses seeking power, glory, and to prove himself to his father-in-law. Maybe Americans did God's Will in American Civil Rights legislation of the 1960s and 1970s. Maybe your mother is expressing God's Will when she tells you not to smoke crack cocaine or have premarital sex.

We can't decide when a decision-under-uncertainty is human will or God's Will expressed by a human agent. I advise not to think of it as God's Will but still to pray for guidance.

When a decision leads us into trouble then it is a good idea to stop thinking of it as God's Will. God might once have willed us to ban alcohol but now I am pretty sure he changed his mind. God might once have willed America to be the police officer of the world but I doubt he thinks that now. I doubt God really Wills us to repress homosexuals and not let them marry. Maybe once upon a time God willed us to enact laws for Affirmative Action but I am beginning to feel God has since changed his mind. When people continue to claim to know God's Will despite common sense, they are wrong.

### **God's Will, Holy Texts, and Agendas.**

Here are more issues worth repeating, and to which I return in later chapters:

First, people cite holy texts as a source for God's Will when they want to invoke God's Will to promote their own agendas. This tactic could be valid only if the text really did express God's Will and only God's will, the text was absolutely clear, the text was always consistent and never contradictory, the text covered all relevant issues, and people could not interpret the text in different ways. Of course, none of the points are true. Not only are holy texts self-contradictory, the texts of major religions contradict each other. There is great danger in citing the Tanakh, Talmud(s), New Testament, Apocrypha, works of the Holy Fathers, Koran, Hadith, Sutras, Tao Te Ching, Analects, commentaries on Confucius, Marx, Lenin, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, and Ronald Reagan's life story, as God's Will.

People pick-and-choose passages they want, ignore passages that might go against what they want, and interpret the passages they do want so as to serve their own agendas. It is not possible that God's Will could be behind all the agendas that have been offered as an expression of God's Will. While God's Will might support some points of some agendas some of the time, it is unlikely that God's Will supports all points of even any one agenda. Being really really really really sure deep in your heart of hearts that God is on your side and you are doing God's Will is not a valid argument, and you are likely wrong.

Second, people misuse God's Will to support their own agendas. In assessing agendas, why not leave God's Will out of the picture entirely, and focus only on the agenda? Rather than argue whether or not it is God's Will that gay people can marry or not, why not just leave out God's Will and focus on the issue? In a perfectly rational world where issues could be decided entirely on the merits, we could do that. The world is not like that. The world is too uncertain, indeterminate, unclear, and confusing. People have to fall back on arbitrary but necessary choices. People have to take shots in the dark and then chase the prey as if they really hit the prey. People have to fall back on religion. When people fall back on religion, they leave the door open to using texts and using God's Will to promote agendas. We just have to live with this problem too and have to cope with it when it comes up.

When facing a question of God's Will, it is still a good idea to look at the agenda first. What do people on any side of an agenda stand to gain or lose, in terms of wealth, power, sex, family, society, satisfaction, or justification? Who benefits? Who loses? Are people loud about an issue? Does the agenda point to motives? Are motives godlike or anti-godlike? Even if the actual point seems to have a basis in a holy text, such as opposition to gay marriage, is the overall direction not godlike?

Even though people use bad allusions to God's Will to support an agenda, and even though the agenda might come out of bad motives, their bad motives do not necessarily make the goals bad. Even though people use good allusions to God's Will to support an agenda, and even though the agenda comes out of good motives, their use do not necessarily make the goals good. We still have to decide on the basis of merits, with some small mixture of our own feeling for God's Will. People on both sides of the abortion issue argue out of bad faith, and misquote God's Will, but that does not mean both sides must be wrong, and we can ignore the issue. We have to decide the issue, and we have to decide on the best criteria, including, for some people, reference to a holy text to discern God's Will. People on both sides of gay marriage and immigration problems argue in bad faith, and misuse the Bible to support bad faith. They also argue in good faith and correctly use the Bible to support their ideas. Neither strategy means there are no real issues and we do not have to decide. We have to decide based on the best criteria, including,

for some people, reference to a holy text. We should reduce references to holy texts and to God's Will to the least possible. We should rely on morality, greater social good, social justice, and economic reality, as much as possible. In modern pluralistic democracies, sometimes we do manage to achieve this.

### **Small and Big.**

The paradox of acting well whether we meet God or not is like another contradictory feeling that, I hope, we all get many times in life and that changes us: (1) we are only a small part of something much bigger (2) but we count anyway, we are important anyway, and all life is important anyway. We know "the world goes on within us and without us" (George Harrison). We know the world would go on if we vanished. Even if we do something big such as think up Relativity, still we know someone else would have done it if we had not done it. At the same time, we all know we matter anyway even if all we ever do is make a kid breakfast, kiss a spouse, climb out of our deep dark depression, or help someone down in his-her luck. The lilies and the sparrows matter even if all they ever do is drink rain and peck seeds. We can take satisfaction in our deeds yet we cannot think too much of ourselves. I cannot explain this apparent-but-not-real contradiction any better than I can explain doing well whether you meet God or not. It is one of the deepest and most important insights about life. It goes along with the idea that God made everything and cares about everything he made.

### **It Doesn't Matter if It Matters.**

Sometimes we feel it doesn't matter if it matters. It doesn't matter if we are important to God or not. We are as we are, and we have to do what we do whether it matters or not. "I know what I have to do and I will do it whether it matters in some cosmic scheme or not". In a good light, this idea leads to the response of "Stop thinking so much. Just do. Just be." In a good light, this is the same as doing the right things for the right reasons and doing the right thing because it is the right thing not because you want to "get in good with God" when you die. This is the same feeling as the combination of we are not very important but still God cares. Maybe it is a purer way of having the same feeling, and maybe it is just a quicker way of having the same feeling. If this is how you get the idea, then get it this way. This way of getting the idea is important in Taoism and Zen.

Feeling "it doesn't matter if it matters" is not the same as "it doesn't matter at all". If you say it does not matter all then you have made up your mind about whether it matters, and it doesn't. Feeling "it doesn't matter if it matters" is not the same as "I have to do whatever I do even if that is bad". It is not the same as "I have to do whatever I do whether it is good or bad or neither". It is not an excuse for being selfish or indulgently hypocritically coercively "selfless". It is not an excuse for acting bad. Even if it doesn't matter if it matters, you still have to be decent. This is another way the feeling of big and small connects with the idea that we still have to be good people whether we face God or not. If you understand all this, fine. If not, then don't worry about it.

### **Great Compassion; Joy and Melancholy.**

All religions, yes, even Islam, teach people to feel great compassion for all other people, even people not in the same religion. Thinkers in all the religions have extended the feeling to animals and nature, even to inanimate nature such as the Earth, stars, and galaxies. It is not just that we are a part of it all, they

are like us, and we are like them; but we should feel love toward them even if we are not alike and not all in the same boat.

Many individuals actually do feel this feeling whether they have heard the teaching or not. This feeling is much like the feeling of the great and small. I think, when people have one of the feelings, they have both the feelings, and do not distinguish them.

I hope everyone individually has this feeling and that it changes him-her. If ever you have this feeling directly you can never again be quite so callous as before, and you might even become a loving person.

Because of its role in all major religions, and the fact that people have the feeling personally, this feeling shows up again in later chapters, especially on Buddhism and Hinduism.

Usually this feeling is a source of great joy but it is also a source of some melancholy. When I have this feeling, it also makes clearer to me how much humans waste their lives and what damage we are doing to nature, the planet, other people, and our selves. When we see the goodness clearer, we also see the badness. Even if seeing the goodness more clearly does not make us see the badness more clearly too, we just always get a slight feeling of sadness that goes along with the joy of compassion. I am not fully why this is so, but it is so, and, if it happens to you, don't worry about it. This companion feeling of a little sadness also plays a role in Buddhism and Hinduism.

### **Evolved Limits on Big Feelings.**

While many of us have the feelings of the "big and small", compassion, the joy of compassion, and the sadness of compassion, few of us can live in those feelings for long. The feelings fade and then we get back to normal life. Usually our lives are somewhat enriched by the feelings but our lives are not usually dramatically altered. For the few people whose lives are dramatically altered, I don't advise dwelling on why you differ, and I advise taking the following comments with a grain of salt.

People who lived long and deeply in feelings of "big and small", great compassion, joy at compassion, or sadness at great compassion, would not have done as well in our evolutionary past as people who lived normal lives in which these feelings did not play a big role. I leave it to you to think why people who lived in these feelings would not do as well. It would not be a disadvantage, and it might be an advantage, to have these feelings once in a while for a short time, or to have these feelings mildly, but not to have them strongly for long periods. So, natural selection would have made sure that, if we had these feelings, we did not dwell in them. If we had these feelings, we would take from them what was likely to help us succeed in our daily lives, such as greater love for family and near community, then let them diminish while we went on with our daily lives. That is where most of us stand.

Given that is the capacity for most of us, it does not mean we should ignore or despise these feelings. We can still cultivate them and take what good we can from them. We should not fear them. That is a pretty good bargain.

I believe natural selection not only placed limits to these feelings but it gave us the propensity for these feelings in the first place. Natural selection both gave us the feelings and made sure that we did not live

in them, for reasons mentioned above. I think natural selection led us to have these feelings in a limited way because these feelings lead us to get along better with our family, friends, and community, and that getting along was an important part of success in our evolutionary past. But I have little evidence for my view, and so I do not pursue it here.

This use of the logic of evolution is an example of how it can help us to understand our selves and how we work, both the positive upwelling and the negative circumscription. It is fun and useful to practice applying it to diverse arenas including religion and morality.

### **PART 3: Life is Real, and Other Linked Topics**

This part of the chapter introduces some ideas that show up again in later chapters. It is useful to have them in the back of your mind as you read on.

#### **Life is Real; This Life is the Only Real Life.**

This life is real, not any other life. To live this life is what it means to live a real life. To live this life right here right now is what it means to live a real life. This life is real because it is real right now, not because it is embedded in anything else, such as a series of rebirths, church supervision, giant divine forgiveness, many worlds, or a big game. This life is real because this is the life you have to talk to God about after you die. What you do in this life is what counts, not what you wish you did do or didn't do, or what you might do in another life if God gives you another chance. If you can't get it right in this life, likely you can't get it right in any other life. If you do get it right in this life, right now right here, then you have done all you can do ever anywhere, and you stand a good chance of being able to get it right ever anywhere. To live in any other imagined life, even the life of endless rebirths or the life of God at play, is not to live in this real life and so not to live a real life.

That sounds too serious. The seriousness of life does not mean life is a grind or you have to worry more. It means you can worry less. Just because life is real we should let ourselves play a lot. Life is not simply a big game but it can be like a game if we don't let that metaphor mislead us.

"Right here right now this moment" does not mean you to live frivolously in the moment like a silly "free spirit" or not to plan. Planning for the future is part of living this life right here right now for a normal human. These are really two separate questions. The important issue is your whole one life that you live now before seeing God and all the moments in it when you have to decide what to do, when you have to decide right and wrong.

#### **Success, Failure, and Real Risk.**

If we can succeed, then we can also fail. If we could not fail, then we could not succeed. Failure is just as real as success. I do not know why this world has to have failure. I only know as an empirical fact that it does have failure.

Success is worth the risk of failure. Most people succeed if they try. You might not succeed in worldly ways; you might not understand why there is evil; you might not be able to defeat all evil or even a little part of evil; but you can succeed in terms that make sense to you and God.

Just because there is a chance of failure does not mean we should fear trying. We fail just as much if we don't try as if we actually fail. God can forgive an honest failure, even an honest spiritual failure, if we try. "It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all" and "You cannot win if you do not play" are trite but true.

### **Success, Failure, and the Spice of Life.**

In a classic Twilight Zone episode, a cheap hoodlum dies in a shootout and goes to his just reward in the afterlife. There he meets what seems to be an angel, played by Sebastian Cabot. The angel gives the bad man everything he wants: booze, women, and success in billiards, gambling, and crimes such as robbing banks. The bad man can't lose. At first, the hoodlum thinks he is in heaven, and can't figure out what he did to deserve it. One day the bad man gets screaming angry. He is bored beyond limit. He knows he will win every hand, seduce every woman, and walk away from a shootout unhurt. He wants real action, real danger, to take a real risk. If this is what heaven is like, and he can't have any real risk, then the bad man wants to go to the "other place". Sebastian Cabot changes his oily demeanor, laughs like a demon, and retorts, "You can't go anywhere else. What makes you think this is heaven? This is the other place." Hell is unending boredom. Unending boredom comes from life without real risk. Many modern people know this.

In one "Star Trek TNG" movie: A filament ("The Nexus") is moving through space. Inside this filament, the world is just as you wish. All the people, animals, and places you ever longed for are there. You succeed at everything. You do not age. You feel fulfilled. You are "wrapped in joy" just as in joyous systems of many lives in Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism. Captain Kirk was captured by the filament. Decades have passed but, to him, the years seem like days. In the middle of a mission, Captain Picard also gets captured in the filament. Like the man from the Twilight Zone episode, Kirk is bored but doesn't feel it yet. Every time Kirk jumps his horse, he knows he will make it. Every time he needs somebody, that person will be there. His long dead dog even comes back to life. This is not real life, real living. Kirk wants real risk and real danger. Picard talks Kirk into leaving the filament together and helping Picard. As a result of helping on the mission, Kirk dies. Kirk knew he was taking that risk but real life was worth the risk of real death.

In real fairy tales, not sanitized versions, people are really hurt and really killed. That was how children learned lessons about real life then. As in fairy tales, in "Harry Potter", good people really get maimed without being restored "good as new", and good people really die without coming back: the parents of Neville Longbottom, Sirius Black, the Weasley twins, and even the great Dumbledore. Some bad people even decide to do a little good: Draco Malfoy and his mother.

In real life, not literature, people die when they should live, and live when they should die. Soldiers, police officers, and fire fighters, all give their lives to help us. Soldiers give lives, brains, and limbs so we can be free. Parents die in car accidents taking their kids to school. Aid workers get kidnapped by bandits from among the people they are truly helping.

The possibility of failure makes life exciting. We likely need the possibility of real failure to make success worthwhile, to make people try for success, and to make life real. I don't know if this is why God allowed the possibility of failure into the world.

The fact that failure helps make life worthwhile does not mean we can take success for granted. Real failure is real failure. Sometimes you don't "succeed at last". It is not the case that God allows us to fail over and over again until we finally succeed. It is not the case that there are no truly bad people and that everybody is saved in the long run. The fact that failure is real does not mean we should not "try and try". It means trying is really worthwhile.

If you do not succeed by normal worldly standards, if you fail by normal worldly standards, but still feel the truth of Jesus' message, and feel you have succeeded inside, have you really succeeded after all? I think you have. I don't think this attitude is merely a consolation for losers. Not everybody agrees with me. This idea does not mean you don't have to try or that the Kingdom of Heaven is merely an attitude.

The idea that real life entails real risk does not mean you can find real life by putting yourself at risk or by putting yourself in harm's way. Usually, life does that to us without us trying. You can wake yourself up a bit by traveling, going to unusual places, meeting unusual people, and doing unusual things such as bungee jumping. Movies and TV extol this approach to life. But you don't have to do this to feel alive, to be a useful person, and to succeed.

Real failure is not just getting physically hurt or dying. Real failure can also mean getting trapped in bad attitudes such as bitterness or in addiction. Real failure is failure of the soul or the spirit. This failure is far worse than dying physically. For comments on this kind of real failure, see later chapters.

An adept study of real risk and the spice of life is the movie "The Game" starring Michael Douglas and directed by David Fincher. Michael Douglas plays a jaded selfish man who has to get really shaken up to appreciate life.

This movie also shows what it might mean that God has to fool himself (fall asleep) so as to have fun, and that humans are part of the way God fools himself; see below. According to that way of seeing God and us, even if we are not in real jeopardy, we have to fool ourselves into thinking we are in real jeopardy so that we can fully appreciate life. I do not think we merely fool ourselves so that we can get the full value of life; I think we really do take a real risk.

### **Order, Disorder, Creativity, Good, Bad, and Greater Good.**

In literature, movies, and TV, the bad guys want to conquer the world, not just so it is theirs and they can impose their will, but so they can establish order in chaos. They justify what they do by saying they do good in the end through imposing order and any badness that happens along the way does not matter. The fact that this stance is only an excuse is too obvious to stress. Examples appear by the hundreds in TV and the movies, and Dr. Evil, in the "Austin Powers" movies, is a funny parody. God made order out of chaos by defeating chaos when he created the world, as told in Genesis. That does not mean God is a bad guy with a great excuse or bad guys really are like God.

Contrary to conventional pop culture wisdom about only rebels being good guys, most order is good, and we could not live without out order. Our bodies order themselves. Too little order is bad. When parts of the body stop talking to each other and ordering each other, we die, as in old age. Yet too much order, or the wrong kind of order, also is bad, as when bad guys want to take over the world, a rigid teacher stifles creativity, or a bad official abuses the law.

A better order sometimes develops out of disorder, as when life evolves or when a smart person creates a fun game or a smart phone. With too much order, we could not have advances in beauty, interest, and good order. Sometimes a little disorder is the friend of creativity while a lot of order is its enemy. A little disorder sometimes is the friend of even greater better order while a lot of order now is the enemy of even better order later.

We cannot know when an even greater better order will develop out of a little disorder, so Americans tend to tolerate disorder on the chance that something good will arise. At the same time, we should not make the mistake that disorder automatically leads to better greater order; and the more disorder now the better greater the order later. Most disorder is simply bad disorder. Disorder enables selfishness. I have lived where disorder and selfishness prevail, and they are simply bad.

There is no formula to sort out relations between order, disorder, creativity, good, bad, and even better order and more goodness. You have to pick your tolerable levels of order or disorder, and then take your chances. That resolution might be the meaning of God conquering chaos to instill the right amount of the right kind of order.

Since about 1960, Americans decided always to err on the side of disorder, both because it seems to go along with political freedom and from the dogma that disorder always leads to creativity and benefit and only disorder does so. Disorder has become an American pop culture value. We verge on worshipping disorder as creativity and the only source of creativity; see the chapter on Romanticism. Even the Tea Party was an adventure in creative disorder. The 2016 Trump campaign was a huge worship service to this belief in disorder.

Often Americans are correct to prefer a little disorder to too much order. Yet, too often now, especially since the 1970s and 1980s with the rise of drug culture, gangs, increasing instability in large markets, right wing backlash, ethnic politics, and political demagogues, Americans have been wrong. We don't have the right kind of order and the right amount of the right kind of order; and no level or kind of disorder seems to bring it. There is no consensus as to what kinds of order or disorder, and how much, are the right kinds in the right amounts.

I pick up the theme of order and goodness several times in this book, particular in the next chapter, Issues 2, and in the chapter on common themes in many religions.

### **Trade-Offs and Finitude.**

The world is finite. Paths are finite. We are finite. You can't have it all. So, the world is made of trade-offs. To achieve deep insight, we have to give up some rewards of the ordinary world and we have to

suffer some hardship too. In a famous passage, Jesus told a young man who showed great promise to give away all his possession first, but the young man could not do it. Good Buddhist monks own almost nothing. The head of the Norse god, Odin, had to lose an eye to gain wisdom.

On a lesser scale than giving up worldly success, we have to choose within the world as well. Usually you can't be a great investment banker and a world-class golfer as well. Usually you can't be the best musician in the world and the best race car driver too.

What we give up is always a lot bigger than what we actually take up. This does not mean we lose more than we gain because, if we didn't focus on one thing, we wouldn't get anything at all. We can't have the whole world, so we don't really give up the whole world when we take up one particular thing that gives us some satisfaction. We give up a few other particular things. The world does have a lot to offer, a lot of joy, and it can seem a waste to give up so much just so we can have the joy in a little part. "So many women, so little time"; or, "So many men, so little time". If we could have many lives, then we could enjoy it all; but I don't believe we do. I don't know if God can have all the joy, either directly or by experiencing it through us as individuals. I don't know why the world is like this.

We should focus on the fact that there is so much possible joy for everybody, and that we can get a big chunk of joy by giving up trying to have it all. We should not focus on the fact that we can't have all of it. Imagine a chocolate cake the size of Dallas Cowboy's stadium. We could only eat a big piece of it. We could not eat it all. We should be happy that other people can eat other pieces of it. We should be happy for what we do get, not what we don't get. If we tried to eat the whole thing, we'd get sick.

### **Limited, Sticky, Deceptive, and Good.**

Most activities are "sticky". Once you begin, even if you did not intend to commit, you get "sucked in". Once you have been "tainted" by an activity, it is hard to ever get free of what the activity has done to you. Once you start an online video game, it is hard to stop, and you are forever marked even if later you quit. Once you start following American football or European soccer ("football"), it is hard to stop, and forever you show the marks of a fan. Once you start wearing make-up, you have to, and your face never looks the same without it again. Once you start playing golf, you start arranging your life around it. Once you start that ridiculous night-time soap opera, you just have to know what happens next. Once you learn the joys of volunteering, you know it is part of you.

You become what you do, what you stick to. Once you start acting like an adult, you are. Once you start selling insurance, you become a salesperson. Once you help people, you are never the same.

Relationships are sticky. Children are sticky. They forever change us. They make us, and make us who we are. Once you begin teaching, farming, or selling stocks, that is what you do. The first martial art that a person learns tends to be the one he-she sticks with whether the best or not.

Stickiness is a big part of what makes the world risky and valuable at the same time. We take a risk when we start getting interested in something. It could be not worth the time, it could be bad itself, it could be bad for us even if it is good for somebody else. On the other hand, it could be very good for us. We have to do something, so we might as well try that.

Stickiness is not necessarily bad. Stickiness leads us to the particular activities that together help make the feeling that life is good. Stickiness gives us experiences that we use to assess life. The Hindu word “yoga” is cognate with English “yoke”. Contrary to modern yoga fads, early Hindus saw yoga as a limiting discipline that sucked you in, committed you, and channeled you. Channeling was worthwhile because yoga was good in itself and yoga could open a road to higher goals. The Buddha had to go through austerities first to get to Enlightenment. For people not suited to the monk’s life, going to work, acting adult, getting married, and raising a family, all are just fine.

Getting stuck in an activity can be bad if you want to reach higher goals and the activity blocks you from seeking them. The activity in itself does not have to be bad; it only has to block you from better. The better the activity-in-itself, the stickier it is, the more readily it sucks you in, and the more it blocks you from something better. That’s what family often does. The Buddha had to give up family, wealth, power, security, and success as an ascetic so as to awaken. I have seen people get stuck in forms of yoga and spiritual activities that were good enough in themselves but a trap when done wrongly. I have seen people stuck in dogmatic religion. I do not have general advice for how to get out of an activity once you are stuck in it and you know you want out. I do not know if we can still feel the satisfaction of life-as-a-whole if we have been stuck in activities and know we have been stuck.

Many satisfactions of a normal life can serve as blocks. In the novel “The Last Temptation of Christ” by Nikos Kazantzakis, Jesus had to give up many other things. We tend to think the most tempting thing that Jesus gave up was great worldly power. In fact, it was a successful family life with a large family, the kind of success that our evolutionary history leads us to seek.

### **Higher Level Reflexive Stickiness.**

Eventually, avoiding-getting-stuck-to-any-particular-activity-while-seeking-higher-goals itself becomes an activity to which you get stuck, a trap. Seeking the highest goal is an activity in which you can get stuck. Enlightenment itself can be a trap. This is one point of Bruce Lee’s movie “The Iron Flute” (Bruce Lee is visible in the credits only). Eventually you almost have to accept sticking to some particular thing so you don’t get stuck on not getting stuck. Sometimes you have to pick something to get stuck in so that you don’t get stuck in something worse, or don’t get stuck at all. That is why yoga is alright.

Deception, especially self-deception, can make the world stickier but stickiness does not depend on any deception. For example, we can get stuck in business without necessarily being deceived about what it can do for us. Once people are in a path, often they deceive themselves about its importance. In those cases, deception might not cause the original stickiness but it adds considerably to the stickiness that follows. Almost always, we must un-deceive ourselves before we can un-stick ourselves, even if later we re-stick ourselves in a better way. It is very hard to un-deceive yourself and un-stick yourself.

### **Way of Life.**

The particular activities that are most enjoyable often cannot be isolated from a way of living. They are big activities even when they don’t start out as big activities. They become ways of life, or parts of ways of life. People turn knitting into a way of life. Being a Mets fan or Cowboys fan is a way of life. People

turn being a fan of their college sports teams into a way of life. You cannot just do a little business; you become a business person, as many young business people learn to their surprise. You cannot just do a little law, you become a lawyer. When I first went to graduate school, my advisor told me soon I could not imagine doing anything but anthropology and could not imagine being anything but an anthropologist. He was wrong in my case, but, as I looked at people around me, I saw what he meant. Being a gangster is not just beating up a few people, or knocking off a liquor store every week, it is a way of life; that is part of the message in the movies “Goodfellas” and “Casino”. Being a “gang banger” is not just getting tattoos and bullying women, it is a way of life. People in particular criminal paths call them “the life”, in particular prostitutes call prostitution “the life”.

Just as it makes sense to weigh particular activities against other particular activities to wonder if one is best for us, being an actor rather than a race car driver, it makes sense to weigh ways of life to see which might be best for us. This leads people in middle age to wonder about the path not taken, the boy friend or girl friend not married, the school not gone to, the hitch in the military avoided. It is not as easy to compare ways of life as to compare particular activities. It is harder to compare the way of life of a golfer, lawyer, business person, and house person than to compare golf, bowling, fishing, and cooking. This comparison between ways of life is not important in this book, except between religious stances, so I don't go into it here except to say that it is reasonable to wonder. I get at it later. I doubt that we all get the very best way of life that we might have had but I doubt that most of us do much worse in one way than another way, unless we fall into crime, zealotry, or the pursuit of power.

Ways of life are sticky, and, once in them, hard to get out. We cling to them, and rationalize them and our participation in them. People go to the same church all their lives and think that is the best church in the world. Business people can rarely do anything else as a way of life, which channeling is not necessarily bad. Old academics haunt libraries. From the “Godfather” movie series: “Every time I try to get out, it keeps sucking me back in”. This is why parents are so worried about what their children will fall into, and so careful to monitor activities so that children don't fall in with a bad crowd and fall into a bad way of life. Zealotry, especially religious-based zealotry, is one of the worst.

The stickiness of a way of life, and its power over us, is a theme in modern art. A poignant movie about this issue is “Donnie Brasco” in which an undercover police officer becomes one of the bad guys, and loses his family as a result; it featured outstanding performances by Johnny Depp and Al Pacino; and it set the mold for many imitation movies and TV shows. Using memory to get at it, Philip K. Dick often explores this issue, and you can see it in all the movies made based on his works, such as “Total Recall” and “Blade Runner”. During the Cold War, as young Americans, we heard stories about Russian agents who came to America, lived here a long time, and then came over to our side because our way of life was so good and they had grown used to being Americans. The TV show “The Americans” uses the Cold War as its setting. It is not based on this issue alone but brings it up sometimes. In the original Star Trek TV series, sometimes aliens would take human bodies and live among us, often as spies for an invasion. But taking our bodies and living as we do turned them into us, they got to like being human, and got to like other humans, so the invasion never took place. My favorite episode was a case when the aliens were able to move so fast that we could not see them unless they wanted us to see them but they did emit a slight buzz. In the remake of the movie “The Day the Earth Stood Still”, starring Keanu Reeves as Klatoo, a previous alien spy, an old Chinese man, at first hated being sent here in a human body, but then got to love life here and love humans. In the Old Testament (Tanakh), angels were sent to watch us but

they fell in love with our way of life and especially our women. That happens to space aliens too. Some movies explore what happens when this process breaks down, and taking our bodies does not lead to taking our way of life, as in “Species”.

During the real Cold War, it is likely some American agents went to Russia as spies but became so used to being Russian that they went over. We rarely heard about them. The side to which you “go over” does not have to be better than the side that you left. A way of life into which you fall does not have to be a good one. Any way of life into which we fall, we tend to cling to and to rationalize. This is why parents are so cautious. This is why it makes sense to compare ways of life.

### **Life as a Whole.**

Just as it is natural to wonder if the way of life of a business person is better than the way of life of a car mechanic, so it is natural to wonder if life as a whole, all life, not just any particular life, is worthwhile. There are good reasons to suspect life might not be worthwhile. I do not go into the issue here because the question comes up in bits and pieces in several places in the book, especially in the chapter on Theravada Buddhism.

We do not ask to be born. As far as I know, we do not choose life on planet Earth, some alternative life elsewhere, or an alternative to life entirely. We fall into life-as-a-whole here just as we fall into particular ways of life. Just as with any particular way of life within this life-as-a-whole, we find this life-as-a-whole sticky, cling to it, and rationalize it. We rationalize living. We hope life-as-a-whole will give us meaning just as we do with being a lawyer, business person, teacher, parent, or car mechanic.

The stickiness of life, and how we cling to it, makes it hard to assess life as a whole. We tend to assess life itself as worthwhile just as we do any activity that we stick to. Yet, if ever we are disappointed, we tend to “flip” on life and to turn our judgment as much against life, without reason, as earlier we were for it without reason. It is hard to say we should be rational about life as a whole, and judge it without falling into it or sticking to it, so I don’t go into that argument yet here.

Basically, except for a few sad souls, I think life as a whole is worthwhile. Rarely is one particular activity within life enough to make life as a whole worthwhile, such as business, teaching, or even family. Yet life as a whole is still worthwhile even if no one activity makes it so. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Life as a whole is worthwhile even if we make a lot of mistakes – I have made big ones.

As we will see later, evolution (natural selection) very likely led us to stick to activities, to fall into ways of life and stick to them, stick to life, and think of life as very good. People are more successful when they believe in what they do and go into it fully. People are more successful at life when they believe in life. The fact that evolution led us to believe in life, ways of life, and particular activities does not itself mean that activities, ways of life, and life, are worthwhile or not, good or not, silly or not. We have to try to stand outside a little bit to assess, which is just what evolution made it hard to do. Partly that is what this book is about, so I don’t go into the issue in any more detail here.

### **Life is a Game.**

Pseudo-sophisticated people like to say life is a game, by which they mean life is not really real in the way most of us think it is. In my view, life really isn't quite what we think of it and probably isn't as real as we think it is but that doesn't matter. What matters is facing the moral challenges in life no matter how real or unreal it is. The moral challenges are real even if life is not. What matters is getting a lot out of life and contributing to life even if life is not as real as we think it is.

People who say "life is a game" usually don't know what they are talking about. They have read a bit of pop-level non-Western theology, and parrot back a half-insight. There are useful ways to think about life as a game but people who say "life is a game" usually don't have anything that deep in mind. They think life is a "mere" game. They think they are clever because they had a minor insight, want to be recognized for their cleverness, and want to coast on it. They want an excuse not to think hard, not deal with issues, and to do what they want. The idea that life is a game should never be an excuse.

One way to look at life as a game is to think of God asleep and dreaming the world; see below.

If God created this world, then the world is not as serious as God, and not as serious as what happens to us when we face God, so, in that sense, life is a game. Even so, life is not a mere game. God made this world because he wants us to act certain ways in it. Enjoying life, contributing to life, moral action and moral growth are important even if they are played out on a stage less real than God. They are important to God and that makes them as real as they can be. The lessons of sports, of being in the theater, or of being in business, are as real as the game, the current play, or the current deal.

The current popular way of saying "life is a game" is to say that this world is a giant computer simulation run by amazing smart aliens or that life is like a computer game. Even if this is true, what matters are the important goals-and-lessons within the game: enjoying life, contributing to life, moral action, and moral growth. Even if smart aliens did not intend to set up a stage in which we face moral challenges, that is what they did, and that is what we now have a chance to respond to. When we set up games for our children, even if we did not intend, what matters is less the game than what the children learn from the game. That is the real game they are playing even when the apparent game they are playing is dodge ball or hide-and-seek. Saying that we are in a great computer simulation or a great computer game does not get us out of facing issues, thinking, acting well, enjoying life, contributing to life, moral choice, and moral growth.

Sometimes it helps to approach life as if it were a game. If we are always deadly serious, and we see only heaven and hell with nothing between, then we freeze up, screw up, suffer, and make other people suffer too. It is easier to do the right thing if we don't think that the fate of the universe depends on our particular drama. It is easier to follow Jesus if we forget about hell whether there is hell or not. How to draw the line and use the right "game approach" is a subject in itself for later. The movie "The Game" by David Fincher does not make such silly pop psychology mistakes, and provides good insights.

### **Judgment, Dogma, No Dogma, and Necessary Principles.**

The dilemma in this section appears several places in the book. The dilemma is puzzling like doing well for its own sake but also worrying about meeting God. Don't dwell in the dilemma so much that you go

crazy. When this dilemma shows up in particular places in the book, I advise what to do with the dilemma in its particular form there.

On the one hand, even when mostly true, all ideologies also are at least partly false. No matter how well-intended, and no matter how well an ideology might work in a certain scope, all ideologies, when pushed, mislead us, open the door to abuse and manipulation, open the door to unfairness, lead to badness, and become false. Even simple moral rules can be confusing. We need more than one moral rule, and that means rules have to contradict each other sometimes. Examples include American policies to grow the economy and social help programs such as food stamps, welfare, and Affirmative Action. When we use dogma instead of good judgment, we must get into trouble. On the other hand, while we might like to get rid of dogma entirely, as human beings, we need principles. Principles are dogma too. We cannot live without some dogma. You cannot fly a space ship without science and you cannot run a country without laws. You cannot run a religion on the basis of mystic feeling alone.

There is no way around this dilemma, and there is no formula to resolve it either because all formulas are dogmas. We have to find the best principles, and we have to practice judgment on the basis of the best principles. We have to be sensitive to when we can follow established guidelines and when we have to use judgment. We have to not substitute dogma for good judgment in those cases where good judgment is more important.

The idea that we should live without dogma is itself a dogma. It seems to contradict itself. The easy way out of this dilemma is to say “We should live with as little dogma as possible. We have to live with some dogma. The dogma of ‘no dogmas’ is one of the dogmas that we have to live with”. That is a valid way out, but I urge you to do more if you can. Try to live with as few preconceptions as possible but accept that you do have to live with some principles, that is, preconceptions. Practice tearing apart your preconceptions. Try to find the basic ideas that you actually live by even if you are not usually aware of them. This kind of exercise helps to clear the mind, find the best principles, and live correctly on the basis of the best principles once we find them.

The fact that we have to use judgment in addition to principles does not mean that everything is relative and principles have no meaning. The idea of judgment does not undermine principles. Another useful complementary practice is thinking about how we judge by using principles, and why we need principles to make judgments even when our judgments go beyond our principles sometimes.

### **Waking Up.**

Every major religion agrees that ordinary life is not enough. Most people go through life as if they were in a trance or as if dreaming. They focus too much on wealth, power, material stuff, sex, family, success, winning, kicks, sensual pleasure, nation, us versus them, dogma, etc. People do not value love, morality, respect, kindness, help, usefulness, nature, and connections. People are what Buddhists call “asleep”. People need to wake up to something more important and bigger.

Religions differ in how they wake up people and in what they wake people up to. We can know stances and religions well by what they have us wake up to. Islam has people wake up to the idea that there is only one God, what Mohammad said about him is what you have to pay attention to and only what you

have to pay attention to, and God was moral. Standard Christianity has people wake up to the idea that Jesus was God, Jesus saved us through being born, dying, and being reborn, and the church is the Kingdom of God on Earth. Buddhism has us wake up to the idea that good moral action is important but that life, even a good moral life, is not ultimately worthwhile. Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism have us wake up to the idea that life in a system is joyous even if any particular life is not worthwhile. You get more details in the chapters at the end of the book.

For this book, the standard for what to wake up to is Jesus' message, coupled with practicality, combined with Western values about good government, and set in the context of pluralistic democracy. I don't know how to wake up people to this. Harangue does not work.

Suddenly waking up is like "having a religious experience". People tend to follow the image of the world that they first see when they feel awake. Religious leaders urge people to "wake up", and religious leaders give people an image to have when people feel awake, as a way to guide people or to control people. When the image is accurate, this is not necessarily bad, and can be good. When the image is inaccurate, it can be very bad.

Almost always, waking up comes at a cost. It rarely falls out of the blue. You have to earn it. You have to "pay dues". Sometimes, when it comes, it feels as if it came "out of the blue" but that is only because we laid the basis through hard work. Usually waking up entails making hurtful mistakes, going through pain, and, regrettably, usually you have to hurt other people too. Meditation can help prepare for waking up but I don't think meditation alone can do the job. Pain might be needed to get started but pain alone cannot wake us up; we cannot make ourselves wake up by making ourselves hurt more; we cannot wake up by causing pain to anybody or to the world; all version of this idea are wrong.

Many people have short clear periods of awakening. Some people have long clear periods of awakening. Some very few people are permanently changed, and it lasts a lifetime.

Recall from the chapter on evolution that animals, including people, do not sense the world exactly as it is, and that the "misperception" actually helps in success. Recall that the behavior (minds) of animals, including people, likely is not fully integrated in one "master plan" but that action comes in modules such as flight or fight, sex, food, play, morality, and religion. Even if there is one master plan, the modules still retain much independence. Even if there is one master plan, it is unlikely the master plan is the same as idealized rationality from Western philosophy or idealized "super rationality" from Hinduism or Buddhism. Deception and self-deception are important aspects of how we strategically succeed.

When we wake up, we wake up to some particular ideologies, even if the ideologies are not preconceived and even if we were not focused on those particular ideologies before we awoke. If we do not already have an ideology to explain our waking up to ourselves, we quickly find some or make some up. Even the Buddha woke up to ideologies or made up ideologies to make sense of awakening. All ideologies are incomplete, false, contradictory, and lead to some harm, including the ideology of no ideologies. So, even after we wake up, we are not fully awake in the sense that we are free from error. Even after we wake up, we can still be imperfect, inadequate, make mistakes, and even hurt people. Even after people wake up, they can hold different and contradictory ideologies. I do not know how to reconcile this except to seek the best principles both before and after I wake up.

It is unlikely people can ever fully wake up to be clear about all motives, feelings, thoughts, relations, and the reality of everything in the universe. It is unlikely people can achieve the total clarity that seems implied in some strains of Platonism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam do not require this kind of clarity in waking up. Neither does my idea of waking up. We do not have to fully wake up to succeed as small but important sentient-moral-aesthetic beings. In fact, the search for total waking up is probably another version of being asleep, and is likely to impede a more reachable, more real, and better, mostly-waking-up of the kind that I suggest.

Waking up is like free will and purity of motive. We don't have to wake up to total clarity about everything all the time in order to wake up enough. We can wake up enough. We can stay awake for long enough. Even when we nap again, we can recall what waking up is like when we need to. We can know when we have fallen asleep again and so need to wake up again. We can know when we act well on the basis of ideas learned while awake or when we act poorly out of confusion. We can appreciate the difference between a good image of the world that we follow after we wake up versus a bad version of the world that bad people fool us with, or that we cling to ourselves, when we wake up. We can appreciate that we do need to wake up, we need to work at waking up, and we need to prepare for a good vision of the world for when we do wake up. That is enough.

### **Common and Particular Themes in Waking Up.**

Although waking up varies according to the context (culture, religion), some themes tend to run through waking up. I think that true waking up can be only to good themes such as compassion while waking up to bad themes such as racial purity is false waking up.

Most religions insist that a person be a morally better person as part of waking up. If you don't act better, you have not woken up. Most morality includes what we think of as stereotypically good morality such as the Golden Rule but it can also include particular styles of morality that vary between flavors of waking up and that vary between flavors of religion. Mystics have their own way of waking up that is similar among mystics but not among people in their religion who are not mystics. Zealots have ways of waking up that are similar among zealots in different religions and political views but are different than the other people in their religion or political party.

Each group thinks its particular waking up is the only real waking up, and no other group can possibly have a true waking up even if many of the details are similar. Most religions accept that other religions can wake up to good morality and to a sense of what they consider God, Tao, or the Dharma; but they also insist that other view of God, Tao, or the Dharma is incomplete or wrong, and so the other waking up is not fully real.

In my view, good waking up is having a clear sense of morality, risk, finitude, stickiness, deception, ways of life, how we get channeled, success, failure, order, disorder, creativity, and contradiction. It is sensing the bigness of the world, the smallness of yourself, and seeing that you and other small things matter even though you are small. It is sensing the limitations of ideology and yet the need for ideology. I think it is important to wake up to God or to something like God, but I am not sure how much God insists on

that. I would like people to wake up to the message of Jesus, combined with practicality and Western ideas about citizenship and good government, but I can hardly insist on that.

You can be a good person, and do good things, without ever having a big “wake up” experience. If you keep your basic good principles in mind, no matter how you came to them, then you are doing well.

Having a sense of the “bigger than me”, feeling the big and small, feeling great compassion, feeling the joy of compassion, and feeling the sorry of compassion, are common experiences in waking up in major religions. Usually, though, then those feelings are tied to other feelings and dogmas in the religion, as when Christians tie them to Christ’s passion or Hindus tie them to the playfulness of Krishna or the grim determination of Siva.

It would be helpful if people could learn to separate out what might be common to all forms of waking up, what might be common to some big forms of waking up such as in feeling great compassion by the waking up of mystics and zealots, and what might be shaped by particular traditions such as belonging to the Republican Party or to Theravada Buddhism. For most people, it is not possible to untangle this in themselves or in other people. It is fun to think about. Later I do some untangling for particular traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism.

### **We Sleep and Dream.**

Before we can wake up we have to be asleep. Sleeping is mistaking bad values, such as selfishness or zealous crusading, for real values, such as compassion. We fall asleep when we are lulled by the press of worldly matters such as business, family, politics, and art; and when we fall into a system that eats the world (see next chapter). We are born partially asleep and with the propensity to fall into deeper sleep. We are born that way because we evolved to be that way because sleeping people succeed better at the ordinary world than do fully awake people. The idea of being spiritually asleep recurs all through the book. The idea fits naturally with systems of many lives, that is, with rebirth and karma.

The idea that we are asleep in this world implies that this world is a dream and implies that this world is not really real. It implies the world is a mere game. A similar but different way to look at it is: This world is really real but our attitude toward it is like sleepers. We simply have the wrong values. When we wake up, the world does not change but our approach to the world changes. Sometimes we see the world so differently that it is like another world altogether but that is due to a change in us rather than in the world. Religious thinkers have both ideas about being asleep and often mix the two ideas together. In later parts of the book where I take up the idea of sleeping and waking, I do not always untangle the two ways.

The idea that we are asleep implies that the world is a mere game, and negates the idea that this world is really real and important. The idea that we are asleep does not have to imply this but it usually does, and that is how I take it mostly here.

### **God Sleeps and Dreams.**

The idea of falling asleep can apply to God. If God knows everything, can foresee the future, and can do anything, then the world can’t be much fun for God for very long. The world would be more fun for much

longer if God could forget he was God for a while and simply play or dream. God would have more fun if he could forget himself as God and fall asleep for a while.

That people are asleep is only an aspect of God sleeping. The world carries on because we are asleep, and the carrying on amuses God in his dreaming. The fact that sleeping (deluded) people mimic the playful dreaming sleep of God does not excuse bad acts by people who have bad values.

The falling asleep of individuals and of God differs in that only God can fully completely put himself to sleep. Only God can make himself fall fully asleep. People are born asleep, or fall asleep, because they are part of the sleeping world that God dreams. People do not have the same power as God over the mind. Although beings other than God cannot make themselves fully forget, that does not mean we are fully awake. Mostly we are ignorant and so mostly we remain asleep. It is not clear if God is the only being who can be fully awake.

It is not clear what it means for God that a few individual people wake up sometimes. Probably it means that God partially wakes up. Because so many other people are still asleep, most of God can stay asleep too and so continue to dream and have fun. God does not need to fully wake up. God can enjoy the best of both worlds. It is not clear what happens to God if everybody wakes up. Probably God fully wakes up, has a good laugh, and then goes back to sleep again to dream another world with other physical laws, other experiences, and other people.

The idea that God is asleep strengthens the idea that the world is a mere game. Even if the world seems serious to use while we are asleep, when we wake up, it seems like a mere game. This is a reason why I do not like the idea of God as dreamer of the world. The world could be serious even if it is a game and even if God dreams it, but most people who think about God dreaming the world and think the world is a game don't take it that way.

If you get all these fanciful ideas, then you are closer to awake than the average person but that does not mean you are fully awake. The fact that you might awaken a little or a lot does not say anything about how awake or asleep God is overall. A hit movie based on the possibility of being asleep so as to have fun is "Total Recall" starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. A clever fun use of the idea of being asleep so as to get things done is the movie "Push" starring Dakota Fanning. The movie sequence "The Matrix" plays with the idea of levels of reality and of one level seeming like sleeping to another or one level seeming like a dream to another.

### **"What are They For?"**

We think we understand what we are for and what the people like us are for but we have trouble seeing what some other people are for, especially if they are not like us. In college, I met people who disdained "the masses" and who could not see why their world is burdened with people who cannot understand the finer things in life. People who like sports look down on geeks who like computers or art; women wonder what men are for. It doesn't just work one way. The masses disdain the elites; and artists disdain the intellectuals. We all make lawyer jokes. The most acute form of the problem is with bad people. What are bad people and indecent people for?

Partly this is a non-issue. There is no reason why we need to explain what other people are for as long as other people are not bad. We don't feel a need to explain what robins and comets are for. Think of most other people as like robins and comets. As for bad people, I don't have a good explanation. See the later chapter on the problem of evil.

Being a wasted person, or a bad person, but still contributing in some ways to the world, does not make up for being wasted and for making other people sad.

### **The Best Me I Can Be.**

Not all of us fit religious stereotypes about what a good person is. We need a variety of people to make the world interesting. For more on this issue, see the chapter on "codes" and see Parts 4 and 5 below.

### **Learning What to Do.**

We are born with a modest sense of good, bad, right, and wrong but that is not enough. We need to learn deep feeling for situations, for other people, and what to do. For us to really learn that, we need to get kicked around, usually hard. Yet if we get kicked around hard, we might lose more than we gain. We might turn bad or bitter. We might fail or get lost. These kinds of losses are devastating. How we think about this problem shapes our overall approach to life. I return to this issue in later chapters.

### **Hardship and Contrary Me.**

Hardship is supposed to make people bitter first, then really sweet for ever afterwards. It is supposed to make us value all life and forgive other people readily. This might be what happened to Roy Blatty in the movie "Blade Runner". It did have that effect on me, but not entirely. It made me appreciate all life more. It made me want to help the people who suffered through little fault of their own and it made me want to make up for damage. It did not make me into a universal bleeding heart.

Dealing with hardship also made me more critical. I saw that many people had streaks of badness and selfishness, and were willing to hurt others. Not all people who are lost or broken are innocent victims or heroes who sacrificed for us. I saw clever users and sociopaths. I learned to abhor self-made victims and enablers. I finally saw careerist academics and bureaucrats that use appeals to the public good to get money, reputation, and power. I felt creepy revulsion for people that use PC fear of racism to hide their own indecency and inability, blackmail people of other races, manipulate the system, hurt their own race, and hurt all race relations. I saw when people brought hardship on themselves through selfishness, short sight, and denial of reality. The economic depression in America of 2007, in particular the housing crisis, came from greed by rich people; amazing deliberate ineptness by politicians; and greed by regular old Joe-and-Jane house buyers who thought they deserved much more than they could afford, could get rich on the crest of a craze, and expected the state to bail them out if it went wrong. I want not to help any of these people. I resent that they can use the state to force me to help them. These people should suffer the pain of their own actions. That is part of the big real risk of life. If I were one of these people, I would not want other people to help me because then I would not get better. Not helping people who should not get help is part of the Golden Rule too. We should keep such people from hurting others. We can't help real victims in pain unless we can keep our resources in reserve for the people who need them.

### **Many Lives.**

The issue of many lives pops up often in this book. “Many lives” can mean going from body to body, being reborn in different bodies. It can mean that individual humans are not really distinct but are really parts of a supreme spirit and so are linked, “we are all one”. Often it means a combination of all these elements. Usually it is part of a strong system that eats the world. It doesn’t matter in this book exactly what it means. I do not believe in many lives, and I argue against it. My argument with many lives is not the dominant theme of the book.

On the one hand, life is real, there is only this life, this life is real, and this life is as real as it gets. On the other hand, this life is not as real as we think; there is more than one life; all people have many lives; this life is embedded in a larger realer framework of many lives; this life might be as real as it gets for any one particular life, but because this life is embedded in a larger realer framework, this life is not as real as it gets; the bigger framework is as real as it gets.

When stated theoretically, most people just laugh it off. People are happy to accept that we don’t know all there is about life but they are less happy with the idea that this life is so less-than-real that it does not count seriously. They want this life to count even if it is embedded in something realer. They aim to do the best they can in this life, and then let future lives worry about themselves. A system of many lives plays a role in Hinduism and Buddhism.

I think this life is the only real life that counts. This life is as real as it gets. We do not participate in the supreme spirit and in each other, except in the same way that any things that interact participate in each other such as a squirrel and a pine tree.

### **Ennui (Boredom) and an Interesting World.**

“Ennui” is a French term for deep boredom. When people are not hungry, at war, conniving to get their kids ahead, or fussing with neighbors, most people are deeply bored. I found both Thai peasants bored to craziness, and they loved to have a White person around for fun. Boredom led them to become rabid consumers. The large majority of people now are bored. The fact that evolution has no intrinsic meaning contributes to the feeling of boredom. The fact that evolution gave us a predisposition to find meaning anyway does not seem to help modern people to find meaning and to alleviate boredom.

Recall the “Twilight Zone” episode in which hell is deep boredom. In the TV series “Star Trek TNG”, the “Q” are a race of gods who collectively embody most traits of God (“Elohim”): all-knowing, able to be everywhere at all times, all-powerful, playful, naughty, mischievous, etc. The Q homeland is a dreamlike place that seems like a run-down ghost town from the American Southwestern desert. It is not a lush paradise. It is not interesting. It is like the background for a piece from the Meat Puppets, Friends of Dean Martinez, Iron and Wine, or Calexico. The Q seem bored to death. Maybe the more powerful you are, the more bored. Maybe the Q whiz around the universe meddling with others largely to entertain themselves. It seems the mighty Q envy the limited struggling always engaged inferior interested and interesting Earthlings, and need them.

Most people cannot fight boredom with their own abilities. Most people cannot find meaning without some help. Most people don't find the world intrinsically interesting, don't know how to make the world interesting, and don't know how to get ideas from other people so as to make the world interesting. They make the world interesting by comparative competition (getting ahead of the Joneses), improving their looks, chasing fads, getting intoxicated, having affairs, violence, art, sports, politics, zealotry, religious zealotry, intrigue, naughtiness, sex games, and badness. This result is not as bad as it sounds as long as bored people don't cause harm. Keeping bored people busy rooting for a sports team is more useful, and less likely to cause harm, than if bored people try to make life interesting by interfering in politics. Keeping them busy chasing money can help society as long as they do not also interfere in politics. The problem, of course, is people do try to make the world interesting by interfering – that is the end result of taking intrigue as valuable – and so do cause problems. That is another story. In the long run, it might be up to adept politicians to find ways to channel ennui so most people do good and do little harm, as in the novel "Brave New World" where people play tennis with square balls, have a lot of sex, and watch a lot of movies about bouncy young women being rescued from serial psychopaths.

Some people really do find the world interesting, such as scientists, some artists, and some politicians. Some people can make the world interesting, even for other people. I don't know anybody who can really make the world interesting for other people if the other people did not already find the world interesting somewhat. Mostly, I find the world fascinating. I don't know how to make the world more interesting for other people; I have tried and failed.

People who find the world a little interesting tend to look down on other people who have given up on finding interest. People who find the world a little interesting tend to look down on other people who do not find the world interesting in the same way. Kids look down on parents, and college literature majors look down on business majors. People who find the world only a little interesting usually end up in middle age among the lost bored people that they formerly looked down on.

I don't mind if people fight boredom with some games, alcohol, drugs, and even badness. I have used those pastimes myself, and I am not too much the worse. I mind when people do that a lot, and annoy other people. I mind when people romanticize badness, bad boys, bad girls, rebel lefties, rebel righties, and the underbelly. I mind because it blinds them to the real work that needs to be done, and it adds to problems instead of solving problems. Being a "goody two shoes" can be boring but that does not mean acting well is wrong or boring. It does not mean goodness needs badness. Badness can be fun. But badness is a bad way of life and is not fun in the long run. Badness does hurt you in the long run and it does hurt other people. You really can do better. Wake up to this while you are young enough to craft a positive fun useful life. Wake up to this before you get stuck in stupid badness and refuse to get out of stupid badness because to stop would seem like a betrayal of that way. Grow up on your schedule to make your own good life.

Saying God is asleep is another way of saying that God got so bored that he deliberately fell asleep – forgot himself - so as to better create and to have more fun. I doubt God is bored, created the world to alleviate his intense boredom, and interacts with us mostly to alleviate his intense boredom. God is not the lonely Q and we are not his human "meat puppet" entertainment. God is not head of the "voyeur angels" as in the movie "The Truman Show" starring Jim Carrey; God is not Ed Harris. God might have created the world out of a sense of play rather than a feeling of deep boredom; the two are not the same.

Finding the world interesting through activities such as science, art, meditation, business, home making, the professions, sports, hobbies, etc. is not necessarily the same as falling asleep although it can be a way of falling asleep. It can help you wake up too. It is not necessarily a way of alleviating boredom although it can be that. We have to sort out for ourselves what is falling asleep, a desperate attempt to alleviate boredom, and a genuine interest in the world even if it might lead to spiritual traps such as falling asleep or escape from boredom. This task is not easy to do but it is not that hard.

Which people does God find interesting? I can't speak for God. If I were God, I would cultivate people who find the world interesting and can make it interesting, decent people, people who work hard to make the world better, scientists, and some artists. I don't know what I would do with the people who fall into boredom and who cause annoyance. It is a mistake to look at people who fall into boredom as "damned" and people who find the world interesting as "saved".

I don't know all the relations between bored, interesting, bad, and good. Good people tend to find the world interesting. Most people who find the world interesting are not deliberately bad even if they are not deliberately good. I think most people who find the world interesting are good natured. I know that not all people who find the world interesting, or make it interesting, are good people. Bad people don't usually make the world more interesting than good people do, but bored deluded people mistakenly think so.

You can't force yourself to find the world interesting just so you can look good to God. Why God set up the world so some people find it interesting while others don't, I don't know. It is one of the fascinating things about the world and people.

Boredom, the need to make the world interesting, and the resort to naughtiness, all mesh with ideologies of many lives. The confusion that results around questions of boredom, interest, falling asleep, waking up, goodness, and badness, is a big reason why I dislike systems of many lives. We resort to fantasies of many lives to alleviate boredom. We think that having other lives makes up for the boredom of this life. Rather than fantasize how much more interesting your life is in a system of many lives, you are better off making this life right here right now interesting. If you can make this life interesting, there is a good chance you can make any life interesting. If you can't make this life interesting, there is a good chance you can't make any other lives interesting. We will see these issues again in chapters on Romanticism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

## 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 priesthods 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 a 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 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 or 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.**

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.**

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

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, the 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

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, Afghans 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.

## 06 Codes

From Dion and the Belmonts:

“I got my two fists of iron but I’m goin’ nowhere”

### **Introduction and Synopsis.**

Codes guide: soldiers, martial artists, detectives, knights, tough guys, bar fighters, stand-up guys, moms, dads, feminists, bimbos, right wingers, left wingers, golfers, football players, con artists, nature lovers, right to lifers, pro-choicers, righteous crusaders, martyrs, and trophy-hunting Predators (don’t kill pregnant women or women without weapons). Codes are a big way by which to deal with a confusing world. Codes are stances. This chapter explains the idea of a code and assesses a few codes.

In the modern world, especially in modern pluralistic nations, most people don’t understand the dogmas of traditional religion, New Age, and politics. Even when people fight for dogmas, often they don’t get them. Usually conflict is more about “us” versus “them” than about “our ideas” versus “their ideas”. Just because people don’t focus on ideas does not mean people don’t need ideas. People seek a simple set of ideas, a code, to live by, that they can understand, and can defend.

I do not distinguish much between: way, way of life, role, occupation, profession, station, “act”, “shtick”, role, and code. Compared to the other items, I think a code is more coherent, smaller, more focused, and more likely to center on principles. A person could follow a soldier code while carrying out the occupation of business. A person could follow no real code while following externally the guidelines of a profession such as teacher, banker, or soldier.

Most codes can serve as havens against uncertainty. Rather than flounder in uncertainty, people adopt some code as a haven. People adopt a particular code because of their own personality and history. Most people just fall into a way of life and a code. Except for remarks below on a person’s “true you”, I don’t consider why much people adopt particular codes. I do want people to adopt a particular code for the reason that it is a good code.

At any time in human history, but especially in the modern world, you could not be everything, and you could not know firsthand the results of every life. You cannot be man and woman, child and adult, hunter and farmer, artist and ruler, Chinese and French, Muslim and Taoist. You have to choose, and, then, stick to it. You hope your choice works out well for you and the people around you, and in general; but you can’t know for sure.

To live by any code alone is not enough. First, you have to believe in the code. Second, the code has to go along fairly well with your “true you”. Third, and most important, you have to live by a code based on the right principles. So, fourth, “your true” you and the right principles have to get along well enough even if not perfectly. Fifth, you hope your code does more good than harm.

Once we see the right principles, they are more important than any particular code. Good codes are only the means by which to live out the right principles, under particular conditions. You hope your particular way promotes right principles well enough. In my view, the right principles are the ideals of Jesus mixed with practicality and Western values.

Right principles are not simply a list. Right principles are based on an underlying spirit. Right principles need judgment based on the underlying spirit. From the TV show “NCIS”, even Gibbs’ list has a guiding rationale, even if we can’t easily state it.

In the sappy “Twilight” books and movies, and “Underworld” movies, it is not enough to be a true-to-the-code vampire or werewolf. Most vampires and werewolves do that much. You have to adhere to deeper better values. You have to be better than bad vampires. You have to be better than average vampires and even better than ruling vampires. You have to be better than the good vampire clan (Cullen) and the good werewolf clan (Jacob) before they became friends. You have to be as good as they are after they made friends. You have to adhere to values that can create friendship across group lines even while you are kicking the crap out of bad guys and defying autocratic rulers. Adhering to those values allows you to bring out the best in codes, yourself, and all groups. It allows you to defeat bad groups and bad rulers. Even if this vision is one version of Christian idealism, it is true enough to take seriously.

Insisting on rules without judgment leads to zealotry. It squashes the empathy and sympathy that are part of the underlying spirit for the right principles. At the same time, judgment is not mere relativism and it is not a self-serving excuse to do what you want. “Principles” means “principles”. Having a spirit behind principles means keeping that spirit through the judgments of particular cases.

Not everybody can feel the principles and the underlying spirit. Most people have to rely on a list of rules as in the “Bro’ Code” of the TV show “How I Met Your Mother”. Even people who do understand usually find it easier to live by a set of simple rules than always to ponder judgment. When we personally are not adept at principles, then we have to live by codes. Even when we are adept, always referring back to principles is a lot of work and is not always productive. We fall back on codes as a more realistic way to deal with a complex world. We fall back on codes as “rules of thumb”: “detectives never betray a client” especially if she is young, pretty, and in trouble.

Regardless of how adept you are at principles, sometimes life punches you so hard that you have to fall back on the list until better days come, as in movies and graphic novels about people who take righteous vengeance until they can “re-humanize” with new friends and family.

People who do see the underlying rationale have to steer other people toward codes that are based on right principles without forcing the other people. That is part of what it means to be a good teacher or a good religious counselor.

We hope our codes do much more good than harm. We hope they are a good way to live even in the confusing modern world. We use codes that have proven themselves over time, such as for respected professions like soldiers, doctors, teachers, homemakers, and business people. We use codes that are

based on simple proven principles even when we know that one set might not cover all cases all the time correctly, such as the principles of personhood, honor, hard work, or being useful.

When we see that our code is not working out well, we try to find a better code. The feeling that our old code is failing can be scary. To a veteran doctor or teacher, the idea that the “tried and true” methods don’t work anymore, and that you might have hurt your patients or students, hurts your guts. The search is just as scary. To find a new code, we have to assess various codes against basic principles. If we could assess with this degree of skill to begin with, we could have adjusted our old code and would not have to look for a new one. The fact that our old code didn’t work out well is evidence that we will have trouble looking for a new one. Still we try.

Accepting a code that does not use right principles invites abuses such as glamorizing criminals, even when some aspects of the code have merit. This is a serious modern mistake.

Usually being faithful is a good part of a good code, but not always. Being true to a code is admirable but being true to a code - intense commitment - does not by itself make you right. It does not justify you and save you. Being faithful to a bad code does not make up for the code being bad. Being faithful to a bad code does not make up for the bad ideas and acts. A faithful gangster can be admirable in a limited way but he-she is still a gangster, and that is bad. Living by a bad code is living a bad life no matter how faithful you are. Only when Darth Vader stopped being faithful to the Sith code could he become what he really should be: good family guy. The conflict between commitment and principles is the core dilemma of some classic “films noir”, of which some of my favorites star Alain Delon.

If you live by a reasonable code, with the right intent, and stay faithful, but then the code does not work out because of nothing that you could reasonably help, or your actions lead to bad results that you could not reasonably foresee, then you are not to blame. Then your commitment is praiseworthy in itself. Sometimes things just turn out badly and it is not our fault. This assessment is not the same as the excuse “I was only following orders”.

Knowing right principles but not living up to them is worse than no code. Once you know right principles, then you are bound to seek a code that works with them.

Sometimes, in one situation, you live by one code, then things change, and you live by another code. If things change again, so does your code. This is the premise behind “vengeance” movies such as “The Punisher”, “Taken”, and “The Losers”. Hopefully you don’t do anything too bad while you are taking care of business. The fact that we sometimes shoot up a place of business after getting fired, or shoot up our in-laws, shows we can err. In theory, there is one set of principles behind the apparently different codes for different situations, but I can’t go into how that works here. It is like the switch from “flight” to “fight” and then to “calm after the storm” among animals.

Even within the same time in life, or even on the same day, we can act according to more than one code. The same man can act according to the husband code, game warden code, angry sports fan code, and community citizen code, all in the same day. Again, in theory, one set of principles underlies all the codes and the switches, but the topic is too much to go into here. How this works out is the subject of some TV shows such as “The Good Wife” and “Revenge”.

What if the right principles don't go along with your true individual nature and deepest desires? Is it better to be an honest adept "true you" who does not work hard for a better world or to be a bumbling strained fake do-gooder? Is it right to give up a chance to express your "true you"? Is it right to force yourself to act against your true nature? To force yourself against yourself seems not to help the world. Is it right to force yourself to be a superficial do-gooder if your true nature is to do commerce, write silly pop songs, or even cleverly con people? For Americans, this way of posing the question pre-answers in favor of being your "true you" no matter what. Being a "true you" more than makes up for not working to make the world better. The America view is not usually harmful but it is not always true.

Most people can mix their "true you" with the right principles, with working hard to make the world better, and with "do unto others". Codes can help people find ways of life that merge their true nature with acting well. You don't need to dedicate yourself to charity and then give away everything that you own. Even cartoons and silly pop songs help the world. See the movie "The Travels of Sullivan". To go along with your "true you" you can aggressively fight bad economic development. You can fight for good economic development. You can fight for the free market.

People have to struggle to find the balance but the struggle is worth it. The modern world could not have been built without this struggle. We would not have the rule of law and would not have a good mix of ideals and reality without it. Fun TV shows are built on characters who struggle to mix their "true you" with the right principles, and mostly win, but don't always win, such as "Happy Days" (Arthur Fonzarelli), "Magnum, PI", "White Collar", "The Mentalist", "Law and Order", and most police shows.

If you can't merge your "true you" with actively doing the right principles, then it is better to be your "true you" as long as you do no harm. If you want to sit on the couch watching sports or "rom coms", then do that as long as you do no harm. "Faking it" uselessly does more harm than good.

If your "true you" leads you to act badly, then it is better to fight your "true you". If you lose the struggle, if you must do harm and-or live by bad principles, then it is better to kill yourself. If you must be a bad person who hurts other people, then it is better to die. It is better to kill yourself than to molest children, kill innocent people in the name of God or to keep power, abuse state help, torture animals, or despoil nature. See "Dial 'M' for Murder", "Pickup on Main Street", "8 mm", or any good film noir. If you are a bad person and can't kill yourself, then expect other people to do it.

Even people who act badly feel as if they have to act badly by a code. The ideology of codes can enable people to act badly while feeling righteous about it. People can merge their bad "true you" with a code, and feel good about it. Movie villains, real dictators, bad bureaucrats, bad bosses, and some careerist academics, all act by their idea of a code, and use it to excuse what they do. The organized fantasy of some serial killers is a code. It serves not just to enable killing but also to let killers feel as if killing means something. Gangsters act badly and feel righteous about it, especially when we glamorize them. All this is why we have to be clear about codes and principles.

In the modern world, we ask a lot from the fit between our codes and our selves, maybe too much. We want the fit between our codes and our selves to come naturally without much work, like being a "natural" at tennis or baseball. We yearn for codes that lead to success, let us feel that we make the world a better

place, express our “true you”, and allow us to “be ourselves”. We hate conflict between what we want versus what we should do. We detest conflict that we can’t resolve and that causes much pain. We don’t mind a little conflict and pain if it makes us seem nobler and if we can resolve conflict in victory. We want our code to grow out of our sense of self rather than have to adjust our sense of self to a code. We want our self-expressive code to serve greater good even if it is not an obvious do-gooder code such as poor nurse’s aide. At the same time, we want to make money and live well by following our code without effort. Even if our code involves violence, intoxication, self-intoxication, and crazy driven focus, we expect our code to serve the greater good, as with the detective. We expect to be a bit naughty and to have fun. In fact, we expect to live up to our code better if we are naughty and have fun. If we have to choose among established codes such as “honest business person”, we expect to find one that fits us personally well. We expect destiny to guide us to the right code.

We can see modern expectations about codes in formulaic cutesy fantasy detective shows in which the hero and heroine have slightly flawed characters but not really bad characters, make the world better by catching bad guys, still act out their own “true you” slightly naughty character, and have fun doing it; see the list above; see “Hart to Hart”, “Macmillan and Wife”, “Burn Notice”, “The Mentalist”, “Elementary”, “Castle”, “Psyche”, “Rizzoli and Isles”, etc. In modern versions, such as “The Mentalist” and “Castle”, the heroes and heroines need an evil opposite who lives by an organized life style fantasy, a code, but a bad code. For the modern beginning of cutesy couples, read “The Thin Man” by Dashiell Hammett.

Even people who feel all-out rage can build a code on that true self and can act on it as long as they kill bad guys and save good guys. For an early version, read “Red Harvest” by Dashiell Hammett. See any movie based on righteous vengeance such as “Four Brothers” or the movie from which it likely came, “The Sons of Katie Elder”.

We have so many TV shows and movies telling us that we can find what we want by starting from the self because we know, in real life, we can’t have success that way and that easily. We need to be convinced of what is not true, and the media make money by helping us convince ourselves. They give us fantasies to make us feel better.

Unluckily, rationalizing our life in terms of a contrived code based on our “true you” has costs, especially when the media gives us so much help. We are not sure we are correct. We lose the ability to assess codes, decisions, results, and ways of life. We lose the ability to assess links between principles, “true you”, codes, the good and bad we do, and the greater scene.

One reason we need codes is because, in an uncertain world, we are not sure where the world is going. If we want society to go to a particular place, we don’t know how to there from here. We don’t know how to steer society. In the modern world of democracies, that means we don’t know how to govern well. We can’t place our code in the context of a good society because we don’t know what a good society is and we don’t know how to get one. For decades, our leaders have offered us no vision or plan. We can’t be sure our code is really good enough. To assess the issue of codes in the modern world, I would have to explain why we can’t self-govern well, and what to do about it. That topic lies beyond the scope of this book.

When we can't be sure of the rightness of our code, paradoxically, we fall back harder on our code. We "double down". We find codes that were widely accepted in the past such as the detective's (knight's) code, and we find codes that make sense because they seem to come from human nature such as the parent's code, teacher's code, protector's code, and martial artist's code. We look for codes that demand hard irreversible commitment such as the soldier's code or code of righteous revenge. We hope the code is correct enough. We hope relying on a proven code can absolve us somewhat in case society is so screwed up that we chose wrongly. For a limited human being, often that is the best that can be done. In these cases, more than ever, we need guidance from leaders, and should get it, but, more than ever, we don't get it. For a good movie with most of these ideas, done well, see "Man on Fire" starring Denzel Washington, Dakota Fanning, and Rachael Ticotin.

### **Commitment.**

I am not sure how long, but at least since the 1920s, the West has taken commitment as the primary sign of good action within a code and the sign of a good person. If you act with commitment, then you have done well, even if your code is accidentally bad, and even if the results are unfortunately bad. We admire people who "stick to it", even to a hopeless cause, or sometimes to a bad code. We admire gangsters, even the Al Pacino character in the movie "Scarface", and the Jimmy Cagney movie characters from the 1930s. We admire dedicated Nazi and Confederate soldiers as long as they personally acted honorably, such as Erwin Rommel and Robert E. Lee.

Commitment is common to every code, even for bimbos, gigolos, and heartthrobs; see the Rob Schneider comedies about male gigolos. Commitment is a point of stress in codes where people face opposition and temptation such as for police, soldiers, lawyers, and teachers. As far as I can tell, commitment is the only thing that is necessarily common to all codes. So commitment comes close to being the essence of a code. That is one reason we value it so highly. Commitment is not quite like other values, such as honor, "always get your man", "never leave a comrade behind", or "if you've got it, flaunt it", but it is enough like other values so we can think of commitment the same way and commitment can seem like the essence of codes. See the Bibliography for more on commitment as part of game theory and in our evolutionary past.

We think good people are more committed than bad people in general, except for crazy bad people who want to take over the world. Good guys stick it out while bad guys run away to save their own skins. We take commitment as a sign of good actions and a good character. Usually, at least in the short run, it is harder to be good than bad. It is hard to resist temptation. If you can resist temptation and stick to your code, then maybe you are a good person. You are committed, and that is a good sign. Maybe you are a good person in general even if some of your actions are bad or your code is bad. You have character, and you have potential. If we could make sure your children stuck to the good side rather than the dark side, we wouldn't mind if our children married your children.

This is one reason why we think any code is better than no code. It is better to have a code, any code, even if your "true you" is simply being shallow. If you have to make a code of being shallow, then that is better than just being shallow accidentally. If you have to make a code of being a selfish woman hunter, that is better than just chasing women willy-nilly. Thus we have "woo girls" and "Barney Stimson" on the TV show "How I Met Your Mother", and a legion of side-kick girls in teen shows and movies. One of the

first characters I recall that made a code of his foibles was the sidekick played by Andy Devine on the old TV show "Wild Bill Hickok"; he might be descended from Falstaff.

If you are committed, and so are more likely to be a good person than bad, maybe your code is good too after all, or at least good enough. Maybe your code is only misplaced in a bad situation. A soldier really has a good character and good code, but he-she might apply it to the wrong situation in a bad war.

In the modern world, it is so hard to tell a good useful code from a bad harmful code that, too often, we give up on assessing the code and its results. Who can tell if a soldier, lawyer, or even doctor follows a good code with good results, especially in these days of "spin" and of ads on TV?

We need a sign that a code is working out. For all the reasons given above, we still use commitment as that sign. So, the less we are able to assess codes and principles, the more we take commitment as the sign of good acts, codes, and character. We stand on commitment instead of principles. We substitute commitment for principles. To some extent, we also substitute blind emotion for reason, but I don't want to push this point here.

In committing to commitment, and using commitment instead of principles, too often we glamorize it. We accept any character and any acts in the name of commitment. We accept bad characters and bad acts in the name of commitment. We also glamorize blind emotion over reason.

For codes that do little harm except maybe to the actor, such as the bimbo code, "valley girl" code, "frat boy", or "rugged outdoor guy", using commitment as the index of goodness does little harm. I don't care much about these codes.

In other cases, commitment alone is admirable but is not enough. Maybe in our evolutionary past, using commitment as a sign of good acts, code, and character, even in a bad situation, might have been reliable, at least as a sign of character. Somebody who was determined to defend the "good guys" in the group even when they made a mistake might have been an admirable person. In our modern world, blind commitment is only weakly reliable at best as a sign of good acts, good code, and good character. By itself, it is not enough. We have to commit not just to any code but to a good code that is likely to lead to good results in our world. We have to commit to a good code with good principles, and we have to pay attention to what happens as a result of our acts based on the code. We have to know the police officer's acts really do help good guys and do not go against the principles of good guys. We cannot glamorize bad acts and bad codes because actors are committed; we cannot extol junkies. When the bad pirate in the Tom Hanks movie about the ship "Maersk Alabama" declares "I am captain now", and means it, we don't think he will now resolutely act the role of a good captain.

In cases where we can't judge well acts and results, then we can admire commitment but we still can't extol or glamorize commitment by itself. We can admire loyalty to a business firm as long as we have no reason to believe the firm does bad things. When we think the firm destroys nature and-or exploits poor workers in poor countries, then we cannot excuse loyalty. We might admire honor among thieves who steal jewels from rich people without any violence; we can't glamorize honor among pedophiles. We can admire "school spirit" but not when the school chews up student athletes, ruins their bodies, allows them to rape, allows them to not learn, and never graduates any.

This chapter cannot reverse the glamorization of commitment and the resulting bad codes, people, and acts. Maybe this chapter can help us see the need to look at codes in terms of principles, and help us to think about right principles. At least we can get over some stupid glamorizing. This was the point of the Jimmy Cagney classic anti-gangster movie "Public Enemy". We can start to admire people who try hard to act well by what they hope are good codes. These comments apply to Existentialism below.

**Disclaimer: "True You".**

This section "covers my ass" against some criticisms. Americans assume people have a "true you", and I go along for here. The idea that we all have a "true you" might not be fully true but it is true enough for what I need here. I correct the idea somewhat in a later chapter on the self, and also in the chapters on Buddhism.

A "true you" comes both from genes and learning. I take no side on "nature versus nurture". Learning comes partly from society. Society partly determines our "true you" but only partly. I don't draw the line between individual and society, at least in theory. In my own mind, I tend toward American independent individualist versions of "true you" that minimize social determinism and struggle against it.

Your "true you" can change. It can change as a result of situations or from choices that you make. If your "true you" can change, then we can debate over how "true" and "you" it is but I don't enter that debate. At any moderate period of time, your "true you" is true enough.

To some extent, you can make yourself. You can get better and can get worse. If you could not make yourself, then it would be hard for your "true you" to change, and to get better or worse. Choice would not make the same sense it does now. It sounds odd to say a "true you" can make its own self but I go along with the idea anyhow. There are limits on how much your true you can make its self. It is hard for a meek decent person to make him-herself into a self-gratifying bully; and hard for a dedicated bully to make him-herself into a moderate decent person; but it has been done, and is the topic of teen epics. I cannot go into the implications of making yourself.

If (a) your "true you" changes as a result of making choices, (b) your "true you" can make its self, and (c) situations can change your "true you", then (d) all those facts imply there is a "real true you" deeper than your apparent "true you. The "real true you" that underlies your apparent "true you" really makes choices and really sets situations. Perhaps you have a secret true soul that is in touch with the one great cosmic soul; all people are really just different aspects of the one true Buddha mind. Maybe your "true you" is a secret darkness in touch with cosmic evil; really, you are a hidden witch who hurts everyone around you without knowing or consciously trying. I think this is a misleading way to think about "true you" and what drives your "true you", and I do not accept it.

Human nature evolved. Each particular person is, to a large extent, the unique combination of a group of evolved abilities. Our evolved self is not a simple consistent whole but a bundle of abilities. It is not clear how well our evolved selves are integrated. Likely we are not nearly as well integrated as the American idea of a "true you". It is not clear if our evolved selves are integrated well enough for the purposes of this chapter; but I think they are; and I rest with that declaration for here.

### **Mission from God.**

A “mission” is a code in a code. It is actions aimed at a goal, all governed by a set of principles, a code. Whether a mission is a good mission or a bad mission depends on who ordered the mission or what situation called for the mission, who carries it out, the goal, the guiding code, the methods, who gets hurt, and who benefits. All this is covered by Christian-Muslim ideas of a just war and by American military ideas of “rules of engagement”. Sometimes the mission is ordered by a respected authority as in “A Team” adventures, sometimes the needs of a good person require it as on the TV show “Burn Notice” to help a “client”, and sometimes a situation arises that calls for a response as in the movie “The Losers”. There is not much more I can say about missions that I don’t say below about codes.

A fun example of a mission from God is in the movie “The Blues Brothers”. I agree with Jake and Elmore that they were on a mission from God. This is the kind of mission from God that most people can “get behind”. You can assess if the benefit is worth the damage. Another funny but instructive example, and a good movie, is “Dogma” by Kevin Smith, with a great cast.

Aside from Jake and Elmore, most people who think they are on a mission from God are not. They are self-deluded. They use the idea to fool themselves and to enable themselves to do something they want to do for other reasons. They use the idea as an excuse to hurt other people if they have or want to. Terrorists are on a mission from God. They use the idea to hurt themselves or keep themselves in a box for most of their lives. Self-delusion for selfish reasons is likely true of most self-appointed missions even if they are not from God, but I don’t know enough to go further into it here. Be careful around people who are on a mission from God; other characters in the movie even had to be careful of Jake and Elmore, and they really were on a mission from God. Of course, “God” also includes “Dharma”, “Heaven” and the “Tao”.

### **Pascal’s Wager.**

Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician and religious thinker in the 1600s. To help out a gambler, he pioneered probability theory. The computer language “Pascal” was named after him. Pascal offered a religious “wager”. Here is my version. (A) Suppose God exists, and you believe in him. You get a rich reward in heaven, and likely get one on Earth through fellowship and through business deals with other believers. (B) Suppose God exists, and you refuse to believe. By not having an anchor to God, you might be able to gain more materially while you are still alive. More likely, you will be hurt by society now for your bad acts and punished by God in the future. (C) Suppose God does not exist, and you wrongly believe in him. You are not likely to lose much, and most of the loss will come from moral acts that you would do anyway. Besides, you might gain from good relations with other believers and by being a good member of society. (D) Suppose God does not exist, and you do not believe in him. You gain little, and you might lose on the whole because society dislikes you. If you look at the options rationally, you should believe in God. That is how you stand to gain most; that is the best bet. Ever since Pascal, apologists for religion have offered versions of his wager as a real argument for belief.

The most common version of Pascal’s Wager is social. Religious believers think only other believers are fit for society. It is better if other people believe in the same religion as us but it does not have to be the

same religion as long as their religion does not conflict openly with our religion. Any religion is better than no religion. Atheists, agnostics, free thinkers, and religiously lazy people cause problems. Most people want society to work. You, personally, want society to work both because that is good in itself in general and because a working society is good for you and your children. To make society work, you should believe in a religion, teach your children to believe, and encourage other people to believe. Belief tends to follow behavior. So, to make society work, you have to go to church-temple-mosque regularly, take your family, and get other people to go too. Apologists for religion really do offer this argument. If you don't believe, then society will fall apart. So, believe, conform, and get others to believe and conform too. Ideally, you should believe as we do. Since the rise of Political Correctness, the Left says the same thing in its own way. Even political leaders who really don't believe in much of anything want the people to believe in something because it makes them more governable. The social version of Pascal's Wager was one of the key themes in social science from about 1890 onwards when social scientists assumed that people went along entirely with social rules.

Pascal's Wager raises issues of purity of motive, codes, principles, and "true you". The idea has echoes in modern economics and politics. Pascal tried to substitute his idea of objective self-interest for the true self. Rather than act on the basis of true self, we act on the basis of objective self-interest, and then that self-interest becomes our true self. Yet, in contrast to Pascal, most us don't want to believe or not believe through a rational calculation of costs and benefits. We want to believe because deep in our heart we think it is true. If, in our heart, we don't think a religion is true, we cannot make ourselves believe just because we hedge our bets and want to gain the most. Our true self is not simply rational calculation. We cannot make ourselves believe because it is good for us, good for society, or good for Big Brother. True human beings don't work that way, or ought not to work that way. True human belief does not work that way. You either believe because you think it is true or you do not. You either believe because it is an expression of "true you" or you do not.

Pascal's Wager points to a contradiction. People are free to choose, and must be free to choose in order to make religious progress and to decide Pascal's Wager. But to accept belief along the lines of Pascal's Wager is to distort free will and even to negate free will. To believe because of cost-benefit rather than because of truth goes against how we think free will works. If cost-benefit determines will more than truth, then will is not free as we think. To believe out of self-interest, rather than because we evaluate evidence and freely choose, amounts to hypocrisy, posing, false belief, and bad attitude. If you believe in a religion that depends on free will, such as Christianity, then you cannot believe in it because of Pascal's Wager. You cannot believe along the lines of Pascal's Wager or you betray free will, belief, God, and the religion that you supposedly choose. If you accept Pascal's Wager, then you negate the basis for the Wager. If you believe because it is part of your true self to believe, fine; but, then, you do not believe because of the self-interest in Pascal's Wager, you believe as an expression of your true self. (I do not go into relations of the "true self", will, and truth.) In the "Matrix" movie series, Agent Smith could not understand why Mr. Anderson kept getting back up and kept fighting when it was so obviously not cost effective and was so obviously irrational. Neo answered "Because I choose to". In the early 1800s, Artur Schopenhauer put the issue another way when he said: You can will but you cannot will to will. You can will to go to the mall but you cannot will to will to go. You either will or you will not. You cannot will to believe. You either believe or believe not. "You do or you do not, there is no trying". You either follow your "true you" or you do not.

Sometimes your “true you”, your will, and what you believe, do not coincide with your senses, facts, evidence, science, reason, and apparent truth. People who oppose evolution are like this. This is an important issue but it is another issue. This issue is not relevant to the main issue here.

I disagree with Pascal and I agree with his critics. We cannot believe as an expedient. We can believe only because we believe. We have to go along with our true selves. We have to go along with what we think is true. If it is in our true self to go along with evidence and reason as a way to belief, then we have to go along with evidence and reason. I remember reading Pascal's Wager as a child and wondering how people could be so foolish, selfish, self-deluding, and self-manipulative. God would rather have honest muddled atheists – who still act well – than have self-serving believers who follow Pascal's Wager.

Pascal's Wager is seductive because it makes us think we follow good principles, our true selves, and self-interest all at once. Pascal's Wager makes morality, God, logic, our true selves, and self-interest all seem to coincide and get along. It is so logical. It leads us to God. It depends on the fact that we identify God with goodness automatically. We seem to freely choose. We choose benefit rather than loss, like adept modern business people. Our salvation is an expression of our true selves and of our self-interest at the same time. We can easily overlook that we ignore free will. What could be wrong about something so neat? Although almost four hundred years old, Pascal's Wager is a good example of modern thinking: calculations of cost and benefit aimed centered on the self, even in non-material realms.

Suppose we had strong evidence that God wanted us to act badly. In that case, we could re-frame the Wager so we come out ahead if we do act badly and do not act well. It would be just as rational, and it could be just as much an expression of our true selves. But we would reject it, and we would not want to think of our true selves in that way at all. We could see the contrived accord between logic, goodness, God, self, self-interest, and selfishness; and reject it. We would rather change our true selves if we could. We would seek a true self that aligned with correct principles rather than a true self that fooled itself into aligning with selfishness and badness.

Pascal's Wager shows that we are not consistent in what we think about the self, reason, circumstances, strategic action, freedom, choosing, belief, principles, our “true you”, and how our “true you” connects with God. Rather than break into these topics here, it is enough to say we seek to reconcile them but don't often make it. Likely they can't always be reconciled. When we find a reconciliation that works well enough to let us succeed in normal life without bad feelings, we tend to stick with it. Sometimes that is the basis for whole societies and sometimes that is the basis only for codes.

Four points: First, people can make themselves really believe something out of self-interest. You really can talk yourself into something. You really can talk yourself into something so that you can succeed in life. That is sometimes why people adopt particular religions. Americans are really uneasy about calling this true belief but it does happen. Americans hope it happens only to people of weak will and bad character, and that is how it is shown in the movies, but sometimes it happens even to people of normal will and modestly decent character. Careerists do it to themselves all the time, even careerists for whom freedom is supposed to be a special point such as academics. People really believe because they need comfort, help, protection, etc. Missionaries of all faiths sell their gods primarily by saying their gods (or ideas) can deliver what we need and not by explaining how their god (or dogma) is true. As beautiful as it is, the statue of Jesus without outstretched arms in Rio de Janeiro sells Jesus by what he has to offer

rather than by the truth of him. Allah (Mohammad), Krishna, Kwan Im, the Tao, and the Force all offer the same.

Second, sometimes, other people can make us believe. Other people can override our free choice. This is a theme of the novel “1984”, and the movies “The Manchurian Candidate” and “Brazil”. Usually other people don’t use force and don’t use long-term clever coercion. Instead, they use clever manipulation and persuasion. Other people do this to us by first appealing to our self-interested need to succeed, as Pascal did, and then by using that as leverage to get inside us. That is what the Devil does in countless movies and TV shows. Whether from force or manipulation, our susceptibility to other people making our beliefs and making our “true you” scares Americans. I don’t know what these points say about the nature of the real self and about true belief.

Third, if we can’t resort to Pascal’s idea of self-interest to mold free true selves, is there a reliable way we can get people freely to adopt codes based on good principles? Is there a way to make sure self-expression and good values coincide? Can we get correct principles to mold the self without hurting the self? That is the dilemma of parents, teachers, and state crafters. That is the dilemma of good political correctness. That is the dilemma both of every “free spirit” and every stubbornly self-promoting careerist. I don’t see any way to absolutely do this. The best we can do is to explain the situation and live correctly. Luckily, evolution gave us a good base to work from. Most people are mostly good most of the time, and are susceptible to reasons and good institutions. Under good circumstances, usually that is enough. If not, then we resort to bad reasons, bad religion, bad atheism, and strong government.

Fourth, in its own way, evolution (natural selection) gets our “true you” to coincide with what is practically good for us (fitness) regardless of whether what is practically good for us is objectively true (usually) or not true (too often). If “to believe in God despite no evidence or despite contrary evidence” led to greater fitness, then natural selection would mold our brains (to tend) to believe. Biologists and economists who want to substitute fitness or utility maximization for Pascal’s practical benefits of believing in God use natural selection to do the trick. We can make ourselves believe because it is obviously practical to our evolved minds. We screw ourselves up to believe in God because we can see it is practical to do so or because other people can get us to. Natural selection certainly did shape our ability to make ourselves believe in what is useful and shaped our susceptibility to other people. We believe not because it is true but because it is practical. Our “true you” really is our “practical you”. We make our “true you” into our “practical you”. Our “practical you” always guides our “true you”. Pascal’s Wager is only one instance of the general trend of “practical you” making “true you”. The fact that natural selection molded our minds, at least somewhat, weakens the naïve American view of the “true you”. In this chapter, I put arguments so they do not go against the idea that natural selection shaped our minds. Despite the fact that evolution shaped our minds, we can still salvage enough of the naïve American view of the “true you” to make this chapter useful. We have a “true you” that often does, yet sometimes does not, coincide with practicality. Our “true you” is not just the part of us that transcends practicality but is in both the parts that do go along with practicality and that do not. I make no guess here as how to partition this all out. I can hold both to the view of a “true you” and “practical you” without feeling too contradictory. Other than this declaration, I don’t go into the debate any further.

### **Pascal’s Wager and Meeting God.**

Many times in this book I say: (1) If you do as Jesus said, without thinking of him as God, you will be alright when you meet God. (2) If you do not do as Jesus said, even if you think of him as God, you will be in trouble. (3) If you do not do as Jesus said, and do not think of him as God, you will be in trouble. (4) If you do as Jesus said, and think of him as God, then you will be alright, but don't get all proud about it. Although I put this issue in practical terms about what happens when we meet God, really I want you to do what is right because it is right, and not because of anything you get out of it in this world or when you meet God. I want you to fashion a code based on what is right, as best you can, given your "true you", and the situation that you face, even if your code is not perfect. I want you to merge your "true you" with the principles of Jesus as best you can. Wanting to do right because it is right without worrying about God is not necessarily an argument for atheism; the stance still acknowledges God without stressing him; see the chapter on atheism.

Superficially, my advice is like Pascal's Wager. I advise based on what I expect happens when we meet God. Hopefully, what I say differs enough from Pascal so the difference matters. First, what I advise does not require you to mangle your "true you" much. It is not hard to follow Jesus' advice mixed with practically and Western values, as long as you know you will not be perfect, and you can expect some trouble. Second, I don't expect you to believe much. I do expect you to believe you will meet God, and so expect you to believe in God, but I don't expect you to believe Jesus is God. Without going into details, Pascal did expect you to believe a fair amount, and all religious teachers who use him (whether they know it or not) expect you to believe a lot. Most people can go along with what I propose. Third, what matters is not what you believe but what you do. You don't have to believe in God or Jesus-as-God, and so don't have to mangle your "true you" much if you don't want to believe in Jesus as God. Even if you don't believe in God, but still act well, I think you are alright. Fourth, I don't think the punishment for not believing in God and Jesus-as-God is Hell. As long as you act well, I doubt you are in much trouble. If you do not act well, then it doesn't matter what you believe because you will still have a hard time when you die. If you refuse to believe in God, and act badly on that basis, then I don't know what to say, and I would not try to talk you out of your stance with my usual logic. We will both find out when we die. Fifth, I would leave practicality out of the issue entirely except that people insist on putting these questions in a practical framework of what happens after we die. If we can forget about practicality, then we are entirely away from Pascal's wager, and the issue is the relation of morality to our "true you". I think most people can go along with Jesus' ideas of morality, and I leave the issue up to you.

If you insist on seeing my view as conniving, using the appeal of practicality, using the appeal of a good outcome when we meet God, using fear, regardless of our "true you", to determine our behavior, then it is hard for me to argue you out of your view. I don't see the situation that way. For people who believe in God, and trust God, then practicality is not relevant. Do what you can consistent with your "true you" and the situation, and things will work out alright for you in the end.

### **Now Back to Codes.**

"Ours is not to question why, ours is but to do or die," from "Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson. I could not resist quoting that line.

When Jesus worked for the Kingdom of God, he believed it would come, knew what it would be like, what the citizens would be like, how to work for it, and what the citizens would do. When Jesus died before the

Kingdom arrived, his followers could be sure of none of that anymore. They had to remake it all. If you know your goals clearly, and know your actions will aid your goals, then it is easy to know what to do. If not, then it is hard to know. It is easy for me to say we should work hard to build a better world but unless I can be clear about the better world and how to build it, then I have not said much. If I think it might be impossible to build a better world, and I still want us to try, I better have good reasons.

Sometimes for a while the world makes sense, as apparently it did to many people in Medieval Europe, during the time of King Asoke in India under Buddhism, or during one of the great dynasties of China. In those times, people have well-defined roles. The roles are structured by a code, such as a knight, cleric, bureaucrat, or peasant. Even when the world does not make as much sense, the roles and the codes live on. People can still live by what used to be good, still makes a lot of sense if not perfect sense, and gives structure. They do this even though the codes and roles might be corrupted and seem silly, as the codes do in Chaucer or in Cervantes. For a while after Jesus died, I think people did just that until they could live by new roles and new codes in a new world that made sense.

When I ask people to work hard to build a better world although I think we might not get a better world, and I ask people to be decent in a world that is often indecent, then I am asking people to live by old codes that might make sense in the transition, might help the transition, and might make sense in the new world. All I can do is hope this is true.

John the Baptist was Jesus' teacher and likely his mentor. During John's time, the Romans had taken over Israel. Romans and Jews (Israelites) both were concerned with proper behavior, especially under such confusing conditions. Roman soldiers and Jewish officials wanted to know what was proper for them. John told them to do their jobs. Follow obvious standards of justice. Don't abuse their positions. Don't use their positions to squeeze money out of the people or merchants. Don't think to get rich from their positions. Do use their positions to give mercy. In giving this advice, John combined the idea of a role-with-a-code with the idea of greater moral principles that might apply in most societies under most conditions. The idea of a role-with-a-code already made sense to both Romans and Jews, so they could follow John readily. Jesus picked up John's ideas. We have been using the ideas ever since. This is one basis for the "work ethic".

People like to think the modern world is more confused than anything that went before. I think that is not true, but, in any case, it is usually hard to know what to do in the modern world. Our response has been to develop roles with codes, to carry out these codes, and to live by these roles. As much as possible we base the roles-and-codes on universal ideas of morality, decency, and dignity. We look to the recent past for models. We hope that, as long as we act these roles sincerely according to the codes, we do well enough. The "work ethic" is one such code, and it still is effective. The idea of a "calling" or "profession" is another.

If you have seen a movie made after 1930, or seen a TV show made in the 1950s or 1960s, then you have seen classic roles-and-codes remade for the modern world. If you have seen a movie or a TV show about a soldier, detective, police person, CSI tech, or medical examiner, you have seen the same. If you have seen a movie or TV show about a lawyer, doctor, or gangster, you have probably seen it. If you have seen a Western, you were soaked in it. My favorite is the private detective genre, probably because of the movies I saw as a child, and then from reading Dashiell Hammett ("Maltese Falcon") and Raymond

Chandler ("The Big Sleep") in my youth. The detective is the modern knight. The modern equivalent to a knight on a quest is the detective on a case. If you live sincerely by the detective code, then your life is alright, no matter what else. You have to really mean it; you have to make you and your code one; you have to live sincerely by your code-self. In "The Maltese Falcon", Sam Spade turns in the woman he loves to the police because she murdered his partner, although he detested his partner and he was using his partner's wife as a sex toy. Since the 1970s, space movies and martial arts movies have been the biggest arena for the knight-detective's code. Obiwan Kenobe tracking down the assassin-bounty-hunter is Sam Spade on a case. Obiwan Kenobe fighting the newly-become-bad Darth Vader is Sam Spade turning in the woman he loves.

We try to live by a code but we can't know if our code is "in synch" with life and we don't know for sure if our code will help make the world a better place. So, even if our code follows clear moral principles, we are playing a game again. All these roles and codes are a game. Children figure that out right away. The game might be serious, might be a good game, might be a necessary game, might be the only thing an honorable person can do – and I think it is - but we don't know and can't know. So we have to think about what kinds of games are better than others.

It is easy to satirize roles-and-codes, especially in their aspect as games. "Don Quixote" was the first such satire, done in the 1600s, although the book was written with love. At least since the "Batman" TV show in the 1960s, it has been easier to make fun of roles-and-codes than to figure out what is really needed. Often, a little satire is needed, especially with codes.

### **"I and Thou".**

Martin Buber, around 1930 (date unclear), in the book "I and Thou", gave a great description of relations between persons. We people might be individuals but we are not isolated. We need to see ourselves as persons, and we need other persons in our lives with whom to relate. We need to see God in the same terms. We need to see God as a person with whom we can relate, need to think God wants the same, and wants to relate to us as persons. God really is a person and really will relate to us. Judaism gives plenty of precedent for thinking of people and God in this way. Christianity and Islam have carried on with the Jewish precedent.

Buber's ideas imply that good codes can arise only out of relations among persons. Codes have to be made by persons who deal with other persons. Other persons usually have to relate to us as persons too. The ideals of the code can be important in themselves, but they have to be ideals with bearing on being a person. Even for the loner detective, the ideals, such as honor and duty, are about relations that normally take place with other persons.

Not all people are naturally social. There is a place for monks and other solitary people in the world of codes, roles, and persons; but here is not where to go into that issue. At least, they can relate to God as the most important other person in their lives. Some people can relate to animals and to nature.

Buber's work fits with evolutionary ideas of the role of selves in the evolution of sentience and morality. Persons evolve only in the context of other individuals that are evolving as persons too. To be a person, we have to accept and respond to other persons as persons. As evolved persons, we never lose the

sense that much of our self depends on the relations that we evolved to have with other persons, that we normally do have those relations with other persons, and that we are ourselves only through the relations that we normally have with other persons.

### **Existentialism.**

“Existentialism” was the “hip” philosophy of the middle 1900s. It was a formal version of codes and roles. The basic ideas are: People do not come with a built-in nature. We make who we are by what we do and the choices we make. We make a code for ourselves that becomes our true nature. Our code need not be set out in formal principles; our basis for action come out in what we do. We do best when we live true to the code that we made for ourselves. Two of the chief thinkers were Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, both of France. She was a founder of modern Feminism. She wrote a clear short introduction to Existentialism.

Most people of my age learned of Existentialism in high school through reading Albert Camus’ short good books “The Plague” and “The Stranger”; listen to the song “The Stranger” by The Cure. For a brush-up on popular Existentialism, see any movie starring Alain Delon and see most French “New Wave” cinema such as directed by Francois Truffaut. All have been dubbed in English. They show how Existentialism got mixed up with Romanticism (see later chapter) and with romanticizing underbelly beautiful tough guy loner losers – a situation we live in to this day.

Among the critics of Pascal was the Dane Soren Kierkegaard in the early 1800s. He saw that this life is real, people are free, we have to take real risks, we cannot be everything, we have to decide, we have to commit to finite programs (points of view, types of people, and codes), and we might fail. We have to decide and commit out of our “true you”. Kierkegaard detested when simple cost-benefit thinking typical of small capitalists and frugal workers was misapplied to Jesus, God, relations to other people, and life. He disliked raising the mechanistic view of some science to a metaphysical dogma. He foresaw that Romanticism would seep into modern thinking to distort all modern life, and he rejected Romanticism, about a century in advance of his times. Kierkegaard wanted people to see the good Jesus, decide for the good Jesus, and commit to the good Jesus. His ideas helped fuel modern feelings of a direct personal relation with Jesus and God although most “born again fundamentalist Christians” and other people who use the ideas now do not know the ideas come through him. Kierkegaard was not sure how to get free people to follow him into a close relation with Jesus, and he knew free people instead would make mistakes. That is part of freedom, risk, and the reality of life. That dilemma disturbed him and still disturbs many people. It is not clear to me that Kierkegaard understood that God knows of this dilemma. Existentialists borrowed Kierkegaard’s ideas on the reality of this life, freedom, risk, limitations, decision, and commitment but redirected them away from Jesus toward individual programs. Kierkegaard is fun to read, and worthwhile, but his style can be difficult.

In 1952, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote a book called in English “Saint Genet”, about a man named Jean Genet. Sartre used Genet as the paradigm of a person who knows himself, creates himself on the basis of what he has to start out with, accepts himself, creates his own code to express himself, follows his own code sincerely, and endures what he must to remain true to himself and his code. Jean Genet is an Existential hero-saint. Genet had a difficult childhood. He was small, homosexual, and a habitual petty thief. He educated himself and became a poet and playwright. Genet saves himself through self-acceptance,

commitment, being himself, sincerity, and expression. As Sartre portrayed him, Genet was not harmful, and was rather charming. In those times, to be a homosexual was highly stigmatized, and so for Genet to be openly homosexual was brave. Sartre chose Genet because there was nothing heroic about him in the standard sense, and much to put people off. But Genet was a spiritual success anyway because he knew himself, made himself, and remained true to himself. Genet had to find himself (invent himself) despite society rather than through society. Genet later became a hero to the early Gay movement, and was referenced in a song in the 1970s from the band Dire Straits, called "Les Boys". People similar to Genet, in being on the outside of normal society but true to themselves anyway, are heroes of Romantic anti-society.

About 1944, Sartre wrote a play called in English "No Exit". Three dead people arrive in Hell. Contrary to stereotype, Hell is not torment-by-fire-or-ice but consists of being locked without relief in a room with self-centered people, including, of course, yourself. Each of the damned has a distinct personality, which we can think of as a code-and-role. Nobody has any empathy or sympathy for anybody else. They never really talk to each other but always talk past each other. When they do interact, they cannot help each other but only hurt each other. They can imagine other joys, but, when it comes down to it, the only joy they can pull off is the joy from inflicting psychic pain. They come to hate each other, and, sometimes, to see they hate themselves too. There is no "I and thou" of distinct but interacting selves, who support each other. There is only "The Wall" as from Pink Floyd and Roger Waters. This is the all-too-common gap between people of different ethnic groups, cultures, religions, genders, and socio-economic classes. It is the gap behind the culture wars in America.

You can't have it both ways. You can't extol somebody for knowing himself and sincerely carrying out his-her own code regardless of anything else, and then complain when his-her project leads to a social hell. It is good for people to be their own self and to carry on sincerely with their codes, but the selves, and the codes, have to connect them to other people as people, and have to do it the right ways. If the selves and codes are not based on deep principles of morality and human nature, then the selves and codes are likely to hurt the person him-herself and other people. The selves and codes can be based on deep principle of morality and human nature without forcing us to deny ourselves or to become insipid robots of society and of some ideology. The only way we can become our selves and not become robots of society or ideology is to align our selves with deep principles of morality and human nature. There is plenty of room under that umbrella for self-expression. Ideologies to which we become slaves include Romanticism and Existentialism.

In recent slang in America, a sincere person, especially one who tries to be true to him-herself and who lives by a code, is a "real" person while an insincere person who imitates real people is a "poser" or a "phony". Sartre said posers have "false consciousness". Imitation is an important evolved proximate ability and people are adept imitators. Most of us are posers much of the time. The problem of real person versus poser is the same as the problem of sincere faith or sincere moral action. Existentialism and modern American attitudes about self and codes arose in part as a response to insincere self-serving posers that dominate in large states with corporations, labor unions, and bureaucracies. Seeking alternatives to false people is admirable but we should not let it mislead us.

If selves and codes look to general principles, they cannot be exclusively subjective and individualistic. The self to whom you are true cannot be just any self. No matter how talented you are and how much

you want to be true to yourself, you cannot make up your own world without reference to general human principles and still expect to live in it as a person. You have to find a balance between a sense of self, the code that expresses self, and the general needs of morality and humanity. This result goes against the idea of a pure self and pure code somewhat, of being true-to-yourself, but not necessarily too much.

It was easy to overlook this reality in Sartre's portrait of Genet because Genet was mostly innocuous, often charming, and sometimes helpful. Genet was like the gay man who is a common staple of TV now after "Will and Grace": a combination of Jack, Will, and Karen, a bit bitchy, self-centered, vain, but often insightful and helpful, and you could rely on him if you and he were true friends. He could guide you into finding your new true you and your new true life. Genet was a cure for the supposedly repressed 1950s. Genet was sometimes disgusting but we didn't really have to deal with that no matter how much Sartre pretended we had to deal with it because, for most people, Genet was a character in a book. Sartre romanticized Genet; and the romantic portrait overlooked how much Genet took his values from a list that Sartre and most people approve of.

Sartre used Genet to make us accept that we are mixed beings, that we have a dark side. In the 1950s, apparently that insight was a revelation. Sartre was fighting conventions of goody-goody morality and Christian spiritual pseudo-purity. Sartre was fighting hypocrisy. Listen to the Vaselines' song "Pure Enough". In the 2010s, the fact that we have a dark side seems tame. Most people's dark side is only a few shades of gray anyway. We can stop finding status as a self-styled romantic existential hero through accepting the fact that we secretly despise a lot of people. The hypocrisy now is not in repressing your true dark self but in trying to live it through self-indulgence. The modern Genet is the obnoxious "trashy" person on a pseudo-celebrity reality TV show. We can stop trying to be him-her. Instead we can figure out what to really do. Most people can deal with their dark side without becoming repressed, cramped, and self-contradictory.

Genet's "dark side" consisted of some odd sexual acts. As long as Genet confined himself to consenting adults, and did not cause any physical damage that raised the cost of health insurance, then I wouldn't care. Some people have a dark side that will cause real damage, such as the person wants to abduct, rape, torture, and kill. Then the person must repress that dark side, give him-herself to the police before doing anything bad, or kill him-herself. I can see nothing romantic Existential heroic about living up to that bad true self. There are lines. They lines come from outside us as well as from inside us.

A self-made entirely self-oriented sincere person with a circular code is not a hero but a demon. Sincerity is necessary for a successful existential hero but sincerity alone is not enough. Being true to your self is necessary but it is the wrong thing to do if your self is bad. Being sincere and true to your self does not guarantee that you are good and will do good. Some bad people and selfish people have codes and are really sincere. In the TV show "Lost", one character was a torturer for a theocracy, and he was sincere. In the movie "8 mm" with Nicholas Cage, the bad people are sexual sadists and killers. They are freely that way; that is their true self; the worst of them makes a point of saying that no bad childhood made him that way; he just likes it. They have a code, with elaborate fantasies, and they live up to their true selves, code, and fantasies. They are Romanticism and Jean Genet gone horribly wrong. Modern literature is fascinated with serial killers for the same reasons. Bank robbers can be logically consistent and genuinely sincere. Modern robber barons who don't mind impoverishing the middle class can be logically consistent and genuinely sincere.

The “culture of victimization” is one logical conclusion of “Saint Genet”. The true modern version of Genet is not an existential post-punk rocker working class hero but the whining self-indulgent self-styled victim on a TV talk show seeking acceptance and enabling. In contrast, when Dr. Phil scolds a self-indulgent manipulative harmful person, and scolds that person’s enablers, he puts into practice the good lessons of “No Exit”: get real and get human at the same time, and thus get out of hell.

The codes of bad people often mimic good codes but have a deep flaw that makes them deviate. Often they see the world entirely in terms of “us and them” and they mistake good general society for a bad “them”. The “them” is not really persons, not really human. They construct a bad group around them for an “us”; their small group consists of the only “real” persons. Magneto in “X-Men” is an example. So is the scarred villain in “The Phantom of the Opera”. Quasimodo, the hunchback in “The Hunchback of Notre Dame”, just barely escapes this fate, as does Oliver in “Oliver Twist”. Writers speculate on where these people go bad and how we can avoid their misstep.

In literature, movies, TV, and comic books, we explore the need for the balance between an unusual self, a strong code, and principles that have to do with personhood. We explore through characters that are in-between. These characters are sometimes helpful to society but cannot live in normal society because of who they are and because of their codes. Their self, and their code, make them both helpful and unacceptable. The smart-mouth detective of the 1920s probably was the first in this line. In the movies, this in-between person is forced into righteous vengeance, rights a wrong, but now cannot return to the society he-she saved. On TV, it is the person, or duo, who have been scarred by social injustice but still go around helping victims: “The Lone Ranger” in various updates, including the doubly-aptly named “Person of Interest”.

A beautiful cinematic version of a once-useful loner who has problems connecting is in the movie “The Searchers”. Uncle Ethan (John Wayne) lives strictly by a harsh code, and, because of that, can do for society what no other man could do. But because of the same code, he cannot live in normal society. His value for society makes him unfit for society; other people are destined to gain the rewards of his life while he is destined to gain only loneliness. In the famous final scene, Uncle Ethan is framed standing in a doorway through which he cannot pass, standing outside a social world that he protected but into which he can never enter. He makes a world for other people in which he cannot live himself. Sarah Connor from the “Terminator” movies has the same problem. We can see her go from normal person to obsessed loner back to hero over several movies. Even gentle Frodo must leave Middle Earth when his wounds prevent him from connecting with the people he saved. Many young people think himself-herself is one of these in-between persons, useful to society but unappreciated and unable to enter society - which is why we have Marvel, DC, and Dark Horse Comics. This situation raises a logical question about paradox, into which I cannot go here.

In real life, this situation of making a world for others in which you cannot live yourself is the problem of “wounded warriors” who return from fighting wars but now cannot fit back into society. It is a genuine problem about which we ought to do all we can to help.

Much of the pain of modern life comes from bouncing between the options of “Saint Genet” and “No Exit”. We want to be ourselves but we also want to have friends and be a part of society. We want society to

be a community. We want to be good useful contributing members of a community. We want to be good members through being ourselves and we want our contribution to come about through being ourselves. We want other people to appreciate us for who we are without our having to conform too much: "If you want them to live you, just be yourself". We want to be able to appreciate other people for who they are without their having to conform too much. Yet we do not want to be alone and are willing to compromise to be in a group, to be "in with the in crowd".

### **Meaning and Existential Projects.**

On the whole, Existentialism is silly, and is typical of the modern tendency to center life, existence, and metaphysics around our selves. But it does have aspects that I like. These aspects are not limited to Existentialism, but they were expressed well in Existentialism.

First, Existentialism stresses that there is no intrinsic meaning to life. Whatever meaning we find in life, we make. This insight goes along with the fact from evolutionary biology that evolution is an automatic process without any intrinsic goal. Evolution does not necessarily lead to big, smart, fast, complex, interrelated, moral, or beautiful. Evolution is only reproduction followed by reproduction with a slight difference; over and over again. Whatever meaning we find in life, we put there. I think the fact that morality, sentience, and art are bound to evolve together points us toward finding meaning in those. I find meaning in science, curiosity, imagination, and, when I can get it, companionship. You are free to find meaning elsewhere.

Second, we conduct our lives well, and we likely conduct our lives best, when we have projects. Just as we make meaning in the world, so we put our selves into the world, we project ourselves into the world and onto the world. We have goals. We work toward our goals. Even if our goal is only to experience the world and to have fun, that is a goal. Even if the goal is to escape the world, or to let go of the world, that is a goal, at least until we succeed. Trying to live without bondage to ideology is a project, even if it is also an ideology. We change the world a little by being in the world.

Third, people make themselves in interaction with the world and with other people. People do not exist in a vacuum, even if they decide to stand on their principles and live by their code. People and the world mutually make each other. People and other people mutually make each other. We meet resistance from the world, and we overcome the resistance. We impose ourselves on the world. The world imposes back, often in surprising and fun ways. We and the world mutually shape our selves.

A project can be as small as teaching kids to play checkers or as large as a unified field theory. People who have projects seem happier and get along better. They are like people with hobbies. People with projects understand other people with projects and get along with them. Finding yourself often is a matter of finding meaningful projects.

Not everybody needs a conscious organized project to feel good and succeed as a person. Life provides obstacles every day that we have to overcome. That is a project without trying to make it a project. So is raising a family. Simple decent people who have little ideology about being decent do not necessarily need a project to succeed. If a project becomes a binding ideology, a project defend wrong ideas, or a project gets in the way of better things, then it is time to undo the project.

## **The Bhagavad Gita.**

The “Bhagavad Gita” likely is the most famous poem in the world. It is Hindu, part of the longest epic poem in the world, the “Mahabharata” (“Great Story about Bharat [India]”). The “Gita” is self-contained and short. It has been translated into many languages. You can see a good short fun cinema version of the Mahabharata, in English, about five DVDs long, but easy to watch and well worth the time. Below I give my version of the Gita. Please don’t trust me but consult a translation into your native language. This section shows a code that very nearly works because it is based on principles that are great but the code does not entirely work because the principles have flaws. The flaws are part of the tremendous appeal of the principles. Principles can be too beautiful and too profound.

The stars of the Gita are Arjuna and Krishna. Arjuna (“Ar joon na”) is the best fighter in the world, of the noble warrior (“Kshatriya”) class. He is one of five brothers, all exemplary, with only a few minor faults. The brothers have been drawn into a war with their cousins. The cousins are mostly good, but have done bad things, and now face the results. Both sides gather huge armies of the best fighters in the world, human, godly, animal, angelic, monstrous, and demonic. The final battle will be horrible. Hundreds of thousands of people will die. Innocent families will be ruined. On the eve of the battle, Krishna says he does not want to fight. It is better to surrender than to kill so many people, mostly innocent, and destroy so much goodness, just to make a point. Krishna is Arjuna’s charioteer and mentor. Krishna is an avatar of Vishnu, one of the three main gods of Hinduism, the god who sustains the world. Krishna scolds Arjuna. I offer the gist of what he says:

“Grow up. You were trained as a warrior. Your cause is just. Your elder brother is the leader of your side and of you personally, and he says to fight. You have a social duty (dharma) and greater duty (dharma) to fight. You must do your duty and live by your code as family member, brother, younger brother, and warrior. Yes, many people will die, but most are not civilians and not innocent. Even among the innocent, nobody lives forever, and nobody is entirely innocent. More people die every day of natural causes than will die in this battle. Of the people who die here, this is their day to die, and this their means of death. If they do not die this way today, they will die another way tomorrow.

Besides, if you think anybody ever really dies forever, you are wrong. People live this life now and die this death today, but this was not the beginning and this will not be the end. People return again to lead other lives and die other deaths. They have lived countless lives before, and they will live countless lives in the future. The world you see here today is only one world among many. The real world is the world that includes the world here today, the world here tomorrow, and countless other worlds like it. Today some people will lose and die; in future lives, they will win and live. Today some people will win and live; in the future, they will lose and die. Everybody gets countless turns to win and live, and to lose and die. If some people did not lose and die today, there could be no happy victors today. If the happy victors of today did not lose and die in the future, other people could not win and live then. The world sustains by turning forever like a wheel on which people take places according to their acts in previous lives and in this life, and in which people exchange places with other people according to everybody’s merits. People were made as instruments in the past to do what they do now. For the world-of-worlds to go on forever, it must change constantly in the present.

Nobody is entirely good or entirely bad. The people who are mostly good in this conflict still have bad parts of their personality and bad deeds they have done. Think of what your own elder brother did to draw you into this war. The people who are mostly bad in this conflict still have good parts of their personality and good deeds they have done. Think of the honor and bravery of your cousins and of the heroes who fight with them. You do not betray goodness, and you do not sustain badness, by fighting here. Rather, you carry on the relation of goodness and badness, which is even better than either.

Even if the present world does not really change but only appears to change, still we must go through the appearance of change in the current world or the greater world of which this current world is only a small part would not go on.

If you refuse to fight, refuse to do your duty (your personal dharma in the system of dharma), then you force the world-of-worlds to stop, you deny the winners of today the victory they earned from deeds in the past (their personal dharma), deny the losers of today their victory tomorrow (their personal dharma), deny the idea that the actions of your cousins must bring consequences (karma), deny that the actions of you and your brothers must bring consequences (karma), deny that all deeds must bring consequences (karma), deny there is a system (dharma), deny the world-of-worlds its great joy from continually coming into being and going out of being, and thus deny the world-of-worlds its great joy from forever simply being. Arjuna is one part of this greater whole. Arjuna was made who he is, to do what he is supposed to do, as part of this one great joyful world. As one part, Arjuna represents the whole and is the whole. The whole shows itself in Arjuna, and the whole depends on him for its arising, continuation, changing, and persistence. Be this Arjuna of this world this day and thereby be the whole world-of-worlds forever and beyond time. Do your duty (your personal dharma) so that all duty (all dharma) persists even if you die today. Fight.”

This is amazingly beautiful. It has inspired many hundreds of millions of people. People apply it not just to being a warrior but to being a teacher, police officer, grounds keeper, house spouse, banker, and any occupation or any role-with-a-code. If life were just like this, it would be easy to accept this stance and to live by this stance.

Life is not quite just like this. This argument-as-a-whole has many subarguments, to which I cannot pay the attention they deserve. Here I focus on what is directly relevant. For now, I assume that Arjuna was bright enough to work things out and make up his own mind if he had time enough. Below I mention the case in which people need a strong guide. The criticisms here do not apply only to Hinduism. They apply to any elaborate high-sounding religious, moral, or political system, especially to one that takes us away from a direct feeling for what is simply decent and away from a direct tie between our “true you” and what is simply decent. I use Krishna and Arjuna to illustrate the problems because Arjuna and Krishna are noble people and Hinduism a noble religion; if it could happen to them under Hinduism, it could happen to anybody under any elaborate dogma.

(1) Krishna replaces Arjuna’s good judgment with doctrine. In this particular case, Arjuna’s judgment might be off track, and Arjuna’s doctrine has much good about. Still, in general, it is wrong to replace judgment with doctrine. Doctrine does not have to be wrong for it to be a mistake to replace judgment with doctrine.

If we strip away the amazing mythological cosmology, Krishna's argument boils down to "don't think too much, do your duty, live the code that has been given to you, and follow properly given orders". Arjuna's problem is neither a bad character nor flawed ideas about a just war. Arjuna's code comes from good ideas about society, duty, and justice. Arjuna's code is based on the good doctrine that Krishna explains. In many cases, Arjuna's code would lead him to do the right thing. In many cases, Krishna's view of the code and his advice to Arjuna would be correct. But not in every case, and that is the problem. Krishna's glib placing of this case in a cosmic context leads Arjuna not to assess this case and would lead Arjuna not to assess any case. By placing this case in cosmic context, Krishna cleverly also replaces the good judgment of Arjuna with doctrine. Krishna glibly talks Arjuna into acting without also thinking hard about the specifics of this case or any case. Arjuna does not make up his own mind about the ideas of the code and how they apply in this case or any case. Arjuna should stop to think about his actions in this case in terms of universal principles. Only with such practice would Arjuna be able to apply universal cases in other cases. If Arjuna had such practice in the past, likely he would not have gotten so confused in this case. Even if Krishna is correct in this case, because Arjuna did not himself assess and did not make up his own mind, he is insincere and has erred. Arjuna has not cultivated judgment. Arjuna is likely to be wrong in other cases. We cannot put codes, and decisions, in contexts that allow us to fool ourselves, not even into grand otherwise correct contexts.

(2) When we replace good judgment with doctrine, even with good doctrine, we cause problems. One problem is that we open the door to evading responsibility and to bad action, to "I was just following orders" or "I was just going along with everybody".

Krishna creates a similar problem that Sartre did with Genet and "No Exit". Krishna tells Arjuna to "follow orders, do your dharma duty, be a spoke in the wheel of Dharma". Soldiers who do bad things say, "I was just following orders, I was just doing my duty". Bad police officers and bad agents of the state say that when they hurt people in the name of the state. Serial killers invent mythologies to make into a duty what they really do to please themselves. Good vampires override the vampire code of killing to adopt bigger principles while bad vampires simply follow their vampire dharma to kill. Doing your duty is not enough even when it clearly is your duty. You must do more than your apparent duty. Sometimes no duty is enough. Sometimes duty is not the right response. Sometimes duty is not the right response even when it comes from the cosmos as dharma. You must assess your duty to the extent that you can. You cannot let duty be your only self. You must assess your code to make sure it is good in this case according to the best principles even when your code originally came from good principles. You must consider if there might be better principles than in your code, or if the same principles should be applied better in this case. The United States military faced this issue after atrocities in Viet Nam led to the distinction between legal-moral orders versus illegal-immoral orders. Each soldier must decide if an order is moral.

(3) In substituting doctrine for judgment, we allow the big whole to subsume away the small individual. We overlook individual importance and responsibility. An important part of the "true you" gets submerged in social duty. We give the individual means to evade responsibility by alluding to the whole.

In American terms, Krishna talks Arjuna into letting social duty define him, thus letting society define him, and thus letting the whole subsume away the individual. Arjuna becomes simply the instrument of duty and of the warrior class. Because the warrior class is part of society, society defines Arjuna. Because

society is part of cosmic dharma, dharma defines Arjuna. When dharma defines Arjuna in this way, it defines away Arjuna. In contrast to what Arjuna does, we can resist being subsumed away into society and doctrine. We can insist on defining ourselves even if we make mistakes sometimes. We can define ourselves without also becoming vain and proud and without necessarily fighting the dharma and society. We can insist that our “true self” not be defined by society and the dharma even when, as a matter of fact, we always act within the law, never act badly, act socially, and help. Even when we act to make a better world and better society, we need not let society and the dharma define us. We can seek the correct way between self and society and between the self and the dharma.

In more abstract terms, Arjuna chooses and changes in a way that negates his self, ability to choose, and ability to change. Arjuna changes his “true you”, but, in that change, he does not continue as a personal agent who is able to act by choice on a good code. In accepting Krishna’s advice to bow to the dharma, without also examining the dharma according to universal principles, Arjuna’s chooses to stop choosing. Arjuna lets the dharma define him, and in so doing, stops being a human. Arjuna chooses to not become a person who can choose. Arjuna changes so as lose his ability to change. Arjuna chooses and changes so as to stop being what we consider a real person. Arjuna changes so as to lose himself in a bad way. Arjuna changes to allow himself to be subsumed into society and the dharma, and, so, from here on, is not really the person that once was Arjuna. Only if Arjuna personally looked into things, and decided, on the basis of broad good principles, to fight for reasons intrinsic to this situation, would Arjuna continue to be an independent person as well as doing his duty, helping society, and helping the dharma.

It is good to recognize that God and the world are bigger than you are, and good to feel part of something bigger than yourself. It is good to submit to God (Allah). At the same time, we can do this without losing our selves. Usually even mystics cherish the part in the middle of the whole. We accept the whole in a way that preserves our selves. If the whole made us, then the whole made us as persons, and wants us to act on our personhood in a way that does not negate our personhood.

(4) We give other people the means to manipulate us, and we give ourselves the means to rationalize what we want to do and to fool ourselves. The more elaborate and high-sounding the system, the greater is the scope for manipulation and self-deception.

Krishna is the voice of the dharma and of society. Krishna has great sway over Arjuna. Krishna can get Arjuna to do almost whatever Krishna wants. In this case, we trust Krishna to do the right thing and to get Arjuna to do the right thing. But not everybody, every doctrine, and every society, is like good Krishna. When we submit blindly to the dharma, we submit blindly to society. Then society, or people who control society, can use us as tools. They can use as tools to do good things or do bad things. Usually they use us as tools to do bad things. Only if we use our God-given (dharma given) ability to assess and choose can we avoid becoming the tools of bad people and only then can we make ourselves into the instrument of goodness. Even if other people use us to do good things, still we have been reduced to the status of “tool”, and so reduced to the status of a thing that does not have self, choice, or change.

As other people can fool us, so we can fool ourselves, and rationalize what we really want to do. From the poem, it is clear that Arjuna is honest when he says he doesn’t want to fight, and when he agrees to fight anyway. But not everybody is like Arjuna. Suppose Arjuna really wished to kill, rape, plunder, take territory, wealth, and power - yet not get blamed. It is easy to feign a high mind, even to yourself, and to

let other people talk you into doing your duty so that you can really get what you want. This attitude is the staple diet of soap operas at all times of the day and all around the world. We can see it in nearly all political ads, especially the negative ones. It is something children learn by the time they are five years old, and something spouses learn to do to each other to get what they want.

(5) The high mythological cosmology doctrine is beautiful but its beauty obscures that we must assess this particular case and that we must live here and now in this particular life. We cannot let beauty fool us. We cannot fall into any doctrine because it is beautiful, and then rest content with that beauty and its consequences.

In particular, we cannot live in other lives when we live this life, and we cannot make choices about other lives while we live in this life. This life is real, it is the only real life, and it is the only life that matters. If we do wrong in the present then we do wrong always. We cannot make up in the future for what we do wrong now. Only if we act well right now do we act well forever. In contrast, the high airy mythological cosmology of the Gita makes this life, all lives, and life, a game, an ephemeral lightweight game. Think about the context of a never-ending wheel in which life-is-death, death-is-life, right-is-wrong, wrong-is-right, change is needed for sustenance, and change is needed for ultimate fulfillment. Such a context allows a bad Krishna to excuse anything. A child molester, rapist, torturer, dictator, killer, or religious zealot offers the same argument and it makes sense. The only way we can be sure that we are doing right and not rationalizing wrong is to look at this case in its own terms right now. We have to take this case out of the cosmic context and look at this case as if it were real. If we want Krishna's advice, we have to trust that this Krishna is a good Krishna. The only way we can know this Krishna is a good Krishna is to examine the principles on which he stands now and that he uses to argue about the present. So we don't need the mythology and we are better off not to dwell on it.

From the movie, "The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel", set in India, the hotel keeper says something like, "It is all alright in the end. If it is not alright yet, it is not yet the end". As a matter of fact, that is not true, and we have to live in the world where it is not true. Even if it is true, we do not live in the happy ending all the time. We only live in the present all the time.

(6) Krishna uses the ideology of waking up to bend Arjuna's mind to what Krishna wishes. He tells Arjuna to wake up to the real world, and gives Arjuna a world to wake up to – the high mythological world where everything turns out alright even if we live by a bad code true to a bad self – as a way to get Arjuna to do what Krishna wants Arjuna to do. Krishna could have awakened Arjuna to another world that would have led Arjuna to put down his weapons for this battle or to put down his weapons for all battles. Other versions of Hinduism, and related versions of Buddhism, do just that. We have to be careful when people tell us to "wake up". We have to assess the worlds and the lessons to which we wake up.

(7) The system of many lives includes good guys and bad guys. In it, the bad guys are as necessary as the good guys. The good guys sometimes become bad guys, and vice versa. Without bad, there could be no good in contrast just as without some ugliness there is not beauty. Without bad guys, there could be no joy in goodness and there could be no bad guys. Goodness and badness depend on each other. In this situation, it is good to be a bad guy. If you are a bad guy, revel in being a bad guy. If you want to become a bad guy because it suits your character, it is more fun, or just because you want to be a bad guy, go ahead.

This point of view is a version of moral relativism. This point of view is a version of the idea above that you can excuse bad behavior as “just following orders”. It is a version of “I was compelled to act badly because of my genes, learning, and brain chemistry”. Hinduism does stress compassion, and makes clear that goodness is better than badness. Hinduism condemns badness. But, at the same time, it opens the door for dwelling in badness, and it cannot shut the door.

(8) If the high mythological cosmology is not taken too seriously then it can help rather than hinder. Some people are nervous and worried. If we tell them a story, they calm down and do what they should have done anyway. (That is only partly what this book does.) The high mythological cosmology of the Gita might be offered this way. If people think it is true, and go ahead with what they need to do anyway, then there is much benefit and might be little harm. Especially if the mythology allows them to evaluate this case on the basis of its particular merits without worrying about the great beyond, there can be benefit with potentially little harm. If a person would make a serious mistake unless the person had a “crutch” of some kind, such as high mythological cosmology, then it is better to offer the half-truth of a good story than to allow the person to make a serious error. Some Mahayana Buddhists interpret Hindu high mythological cosmology in this way. They call it “using expedient means”.

Although stories can be useful, they can also be misleading. Once you have seen the truth beneath the story, if you can do it, both Hindus and Buddhists advise getting rid of the stories (expedient means). The Western philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein called this “getting rid of the ladder once you have climbed up the ladder”.

I do not think the original writers of the Gita meant the high mythological cosmology in this way, mostly as a convenient means to get people free to act rightly. I think they believed high mythological cosmology literally. I think they meant this high mythological cosmology at face value, and did not mean it primarily as a method to quiet minds so that people could assess properly and do the right thing. I am not sure what later Hindu thinkers have made of the Gita.

I am wary of the stories (expedient means) because they are easily abused. People who learn through one story (expedient means), such as a high cosmology, too often never can get beyond that particular vision to the real issues of morality and life that lie underneath. They cling to the story and it becomes another kind of trap for them. People who learn several stories (expedient means), and thus catch a glimpse of what lies beneath, too often become rather arrogant, and thus betray what they glimpse.

Hinduism has high principles by which to make decisions and to practice Krishna’s code of duty and honor in particular cases. Hinduism has some of the most sensitive and admirable principles ever stated. Hindus could see out what to do in particular cases. In the particular case of Arjuna and the war, Krishna likely gave Arjuna the correct advice. That fact does not argue against my point, it supports my point. If we already have high principles, and base our action on those, then we do not need dogmas, such as the high mythological cosmology and the false waking up, especially when they lead us astray. We should simply practice our high principles as they are needed. Do the right thing, right now. Elaboration adds nothing no matter how grand it is. Reality is more interesting, and ultimately more useful, even than the greatest fantasy.

Some people can't think through many particular cases. They need guides. Nearly all of us get stuck sometimes in cases that we can't think through. We all need guides sometimes. Codes and laws are guides. Teachers are guides, largely because they can interpret codes for particular cases. Sometimes we have to trust the judgment of teachers. This is a big part of the guru-student relation in India. But this is not what was going on with Krishna and Arjuna. Arjuna was no fool. Given time, he could have made up his mind, and should have made up his mind before the battle. Krishna does not represent the good teacher that we need because we have limited abilities. Krishna represents an ideology that is used to control Arjuna and, eventually, to subsume Arjuna away. We should resist ideologies like that and resist teachers who push ideologies like that.

When teachers have students who cannot make up their own mind, then teachers have an obligation to get it right both for themselves and their students. Teachers have an obligation to move their students to the point where the students are as independent as possible. Even military officers have this obligation with their subordinate soldiers. Some situations are not about figuring it out but about acting quickly and decisively, such as in the military or in martial arts. In those cases, the ideas that I have been describing have to be modified. They don't have to be abandoned. These are examples of particular cases that we have to figure out. These topics do not undermine what I have said so far and so we don't need to go into them anymore.

It is hard to live in a confusing world, find a deeply principled code, realize we have to assess our code ourselves, actually do it, and relate to people while we are doing all this.

### **The Illiad.**

The usual name for what Americans now call "Greeks" was "Hellenes" ("hel-leens") because in myth they descended from a man named "Hellene". Their homeland was called "Hellas" and the Hellenes were also called "Hellas". "Hellas" is often called "Achaea" ("Akhea", "Ahea", "Achea", or "Ashea") and the people called "Achaean". "Greece" was one part of Hellas-Achaea. "Ilium" was the Hellenic name for the city-state that we now call "Troy". Ilium was on the west coast of what is now Turkey, flourishing before 1200 BCE (AD), well before Kings David and Solomon in Jerusalem. The Trojans likely were Hittites, cousins of Greeks and Romans. Their name for their city likely was "Wilusa" (so "Ilium") or "Triwusa" (so "Troy").

The "Iliad" ("story about Ilium") is an epic poem about the war by the Hellenes against Ilium for control of the Eastern Mediterranean. The war likely happened before 1200 BCE. The poem likely was recited by 1000 BCE, and written down before 600 BCE. It was already a treasure from the far past by 450 BCE. It was written about the same time as the Pentateuch and the histories in the Tanakh (Old Testament).

The woman "Helen of Troy" is called that because she went to Troy but originally Helen came from Crete, Mycenae, or Sparta (the story comes in versions). Helen was the daughter of Leda of Mycenae or Sparta, and sister of Castor, Polydeukes (Pollux and "Polioudakis"), and Clytemnestra. Helen was the wife of King Menelaus of Sparta, but she ran away to Ilium with Prince Paris of Ilium. Paris was the youngest of two princes of Ilium. Then, "Paris" was a boy's name. This silly affair provided an excuse for a war by which to achieve bigger goals. Menelaus' brother Agamemnon was king of the pre-eminent Hellenic city-state Mycenae, sister state to Sparta, and thus Agamemnon was one of a few kings entitled to lead all Hellenes in a crisis. In this event, he saw an excuse to unite the Hellenes against Ilium and so

to gain power both for Hellenes and him. The King of Ilium was Priam (“Pree-am”). Besides Paris, Priam had a son named Hector, the eldest Prince, brave, honorable, noble, the second or third best fighter in the world, and a good family man. He was a model man for Ilium and the world. The “Iliad” ends before the famous Trojan horse. The Trojan War has been made into a movie many times. “Troy” starring Brad Pitt and Eric Bana was good, and gave the main theme well. The ending is a bit sappy and it differs from the feel of the poem but that fault is not serious.

Really, the Iliad is the story of one warrior, Achilles (“A-kil-lees”, or, in my parents’ dialect, “ah-shil-less”), and of the change in Achilles. Achilles was a Hellene, the best fighter in the world, and knew it. He took nothing from nobody. He never backed down and he never gave up a chance for glory. Glory was immortality. He did not look for frivolous fights, did not oppress people, did not kill weak people, but he did not mind killing, and could enjoy it. He was leader of the soldiers from his city, the “Myrmidons” (“ant people”), the best force of Hellas and thus the best in the world. Nobody thought less of Achilles for how he acted. The Hellenes and the world knew and respected him. They knew he lived by the code of a fighter. Achilles was not a dolt or a brute, and had been raised well by a famous civilized teacher; but glory and honor overrode all. Achilles was like the characters played by Charles Bronson, Steve McQueen, and James Coburn at the start of the movie “The Magnificent Seven”. Achilles was not like the Yul Brynner character, Chris, the “gunfighter in black”. Achilles was like a modern smart tough guy in a “hood” who is over-sensitive to disrespect (“dis”), and fights constantly, but Achilles always won.

Achilles and Agamemnon had a running conflict because Achilles would not accept the personality or the authority of Agamemnon while Agamemnon envied the fighting skill of Achilles and the respect given him. Achilles took captive a woman named Briseis (“bris-ay-ees” with “ay” as in “play”). Then, in a roundabout way, as part of their conflict, Agamemnon claimed Briseis because he was King of Hellas for the war, and so technically outranked Achilles. Agamemnon used Briseis to show his superiority to Achilles in the only way he could, and everybody knew so. Achilles threw a snit fit, refused to fight in the war, and refused to allow the Myrmidons to fight. Although Achilles liked Briseis personally, that was not what the argument was about. Achilles denied that anybody came before him; and he asserted that nobody had any right to take from him what he had taken in a fight. By his code then, Achilles was right.

Without Achilles, the Trojans nearly routed the Achaeans (Hellenes). To save the Achaeans, Achilles let a lifelong friend, Patroclus, wear his distinctive armor and lead the Myrmidons into battle. The Myrmidons saved the Achaeans but Hector killed Patroclus in single combat. Hector had done no wrong but Achilles was furious anyway. Achilles and Agamemnon patched up, and Achilles went to war against Troy. Achilles faced Hector man-to-man, and killed Hector. Instead of giving Hector’s body back for funeral rites, as was the custom among Hellenes and Trojans, Achilles dragged Hector’s body around behind his chariot, and dragged it back to the Achaean camp - a serious breach of ethics and a base insult. Achilles was within his code as a fighter but dragging Hector’s body and keeping it was vile anyway. Achilles judged badly.

Risking everything, Priam, King of Troy, father of Hector, snuck into the Myrmidon camp at night to beg Achilles for Hector’s body. For the first time in his life, Achilles saw not an opponent but a simple human, a father, in pain, with simple needs; and Achilles could help this man. He recalled his own father and the better teachings of his youth. Achilles changed. He began to judge well. He gave Hector’s body back to Priam, made sure Priam got back to Ilium, and enforced a peace between Hellas and Troy for twelve

days so Priam could give Hector the full rites that he deserved. Achilles saw that something was more important than glory and revenge. In the movie, Achilles saw that Hellas was more important than his glory, and he fought for Hellas. (In the poem, the gods get a lot of credit for sending Priam to Achilles, and for predisposing Achilles to accept Priam. Giving credit to the gods was natural for the time. Even so, I think the main emphasis is on people, and I stand by my interpretation.)

Achilles' ability to see Priam his enemy as another person is like Jesus' teaching to see other people as persons like us, and even to love our enemies; but Achilles never reached that level. He was able to see his enemies as persons like himself, and that is a great good thing. Achilles ability to see Priam his enemy as another person like himself is like the teaching in the Hindu Upanishads "you are that" and the teaching in many Hindu documents to love all life. Achilles does not rise to that level either but it still is along the same lines. Once we get Achilles' ideas of simple decency and its connection to seeing people as persons like us, we can use the idea to appreciate other principles, adopt other principles, and assess the principles that other people hold.

Achilles was never as good a man as Arjuna or Hector. Even after he changed, Achilles did not become a thoughtful nice man. Achilles rose maybe to the level of the Steve McQueen character at the end of "The Magnificent Seven". After the change, Achilles chose to fight in this particular war, just as Krishna urged Arjuna to fight in his war. Achilles' newfound feeling for persons did not make him a statesman or wimp. Still, however modest, the change in Achilles is important. Achilles looked at his code and saw that the fighter code was not the best he could live by, even if he could live by it and get respect. Achilles saw that he lived as a person, and that the fighter code did not allow him to act best as a person. Achilles saw that the fighter code was not the best application of his principles in this case, and he sought the best application. Achilles saw that the fighter code was not the best in general, and sought something better. Achilles did not rationalize his new self or new actions. He said no grand speeches. He had no ideology or system. Achilles simply responded to decency and humanity. He used his talents as he could to make a better world right then right there as much he knew how. Achilles woke up. He woke up by himself. Nobody woke him up to show him a particular world with particular rules. Achilles did not wake up to any mythological metaphysical system but to the simple world around him, made of people with values, who struggle to live by their values.

Achilles "true you" changed in response to the situation and as the result of his choice. He made his new self in response to the situation and to better principles. He became a good responsible soldier instead of a glorious fighter. Whether there was a deeper truer self "in there" all along, a person who was somehow in accord with better values, it makes little sense to debate. It is enough to see that Achilles did change and that his new true self was more in accord with correct principles.

The idea of simply waking up to obvious decency, without serving an elaborate system, is why I tell this story. Once we wake up to that, we can make a code for ourselves as befits our raising and our situation, in line with the principles of simple decency and with our true selves. If we pursue ideology later, that is fine, but we should not let ideology get in the way of seeing simple decency and following it. We should not cling to a code that harms basic decency. Seeking simple decency first does not always work but it is the best place to start. I find it much easier to move from simple decent good acts to the ideals of Jesus, practicality, and Western values about persons and good government, than to get there from any other

starting point, including the grand beautiful cosmic-social duty of the Bhagavad Gita, the logic of Pascal, the call of Existentialism, political correctness, Libertarianism, or any political ideology.

Is simple decency enough of a base on which to build a code? By itself, it is not. But along with simple decency we have the ideas of people like Jesus, Moses, Mohammad, the Buddha, Confucius, Chuang Tzu, and Krishna. We have enough to extend simple decency. If we start with decency, we can extend it using other ideas without letting other ideas fool us into compromising the original sense of decency. We can extend decency into different situations in different way. We can see if our extensions compare well with other extensions, and can use our basic feeling of decency to judge other codes.

I don't think Achilles chose to fight again because he bowed to the pressure of society, to his social duty, to his dharma, or to the great dharma. If he felt like that, he would have fought before. I hope Achilles based his decision to fight again on his new principles and his new sense of a true you.

I am not saying here that all aspects of Hellenic-Western culture are better than all aspects of Hindu culture. Hindus certainly understand Achilles and his change. I am saying these issues are old, and we can learn from what other people have thought. It is good to have a code and to be true to your code. Sometimes that is the only way we can live. Sometimes even vengeance makes sense. It is best if your code is based on deep principles of morality, decency, duty, honor, and human relations. If you find better principles than the principles that you use right now, you have to change your code and yourself accordingly. If you find a better application (interpretation) of your principles, then you have to adopt it. You have to look at your code and principles from time to time to make sure what is best to do. You have to look at your context, of this case, in this life, now. That is what Achilles did. When you change your code to accord with better principles, you also likely change your "true you" for the better. In that respect, Western-Greek principles are better than Hindu principles.

To be honest, in a later chapter, I do criticize Hinduism, and what I said here sets the stage. Although Hinduism knows of the correct principles, and knows that codes should change to accord with the right principles, it does not commit to the right principles. It gets trapped in a metaphysical system that allows people to override simple decency, rationalize self-interest, and bolster a bad class-and-sexist society. Hindus are not committed to the ideals of Jesus mixed with practical reality and Western values. Most Hindus are not enough like Gandhi and Nehru. Hinduism developed the ideals of the Bhagavad Gita in the wrong ways.

Waking up to something bigger and better than yourself is a theme of the movie "Hero" with Jet Li. More important than personal revenge, or than sectarian revenge, is your nation and its welfare. Waking up to something bigger and better than yourself, to true good principles, is one theme of "A Few Good Men". More important than following orders is protecting people who can't protect themselves, such as Private Santiago. A true officer is not a person who expedites matters but a person who gets to the bottom of issues and who makes a system in which honorable soldiers do protect the innocent. Maybe the people who do examine their codes have trouble handling reality, as the Jack Nicholson character notoriously proclaimed ("You can't handle the truth"), but so do the people who doggedly impose a code regardless of who gets hurt. We need a constant search among principles for best codes and best applications.

Achilles has many descendants, even if few are as heroic or profound. Not every character that changes and grows is an Achilles, but, still, some characters do echo him, especially if they come to feel common humanity, dignity, decency, and something bigger than themselves. One of my favorites is in the movie "Casablanca" in which Rick, played by Humphrey Bogart, comes to see that his issues "don't amount to a hill of beans", and that the war for freedom is far more important. In the movie "The Magnificent Seven", the young man who wants to be a gunfighter, and who grows up during the movie, is like Achilles. The book of Jonah in the Tanakh (Old Testament) likely was written a few hundred years after the Iliad and it has similar lessons. Although Jonah the Israelite hated the Assyrians for conquering Israel, God made Jonah go to the capital Nineveh to preach to the Assyrians. When the Assyrians took God to heart, Jonah came to see the Assyrians as human like him and as followers of God like Jews. The real change was not the Assyrians but Jonah. A real human man, Malcom X, an American Black Muslim, started as a bigot hating Whites. Then he went to Mecca, felt common bonds with Muslims of all colors from all over the world, and gave up his hate. Many characters in the media recently have come to see Gay people as real people, and to see their humanity as more important than sexual (gender) orientation. The Australian movie, "Strange Bedfellows", with Paul Hogan, likely was the prototype for the American movie, "I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry". In the movie "La Cage Aux Folles", "straight" people had to make a leap to greater humanity. The TV shows "Will and Grace" and "Modern Family" helped modern people to do the same.

Even characters that are not always noble, characters that hold a righteous grudge, such as the Hulk and the Punisher, still can come to moral high ground. They stop hating their enemies even if they can't stop fighting their enemies. They come to see a small group of humans as helpful and friendly. They find their lost humanity. Figure out for yourself if Jean Genet is a descendant of Achilles.

Sadly, Achilles and his change are now abused by the culture of "15 minutes of fame" and "victimization". People can feign the need to change, and can fake a big change, just to get in the spotlight and to gain sympathy. Bad people appeal to good people using the Achilles paradigm. The bad people pretend to change, and the bad people allow good people to feel like Achilles becoming a better person, so that the bad people can get money from the good people. "You can help me overcome addiction". "I can help you overcome addiction and stop being a burden on your family". This is what comes of substituting bad ideology for good judgment.

We like Achilles more because he does a good act and he changes into a good man than because he was a good man all along and did a lot of good all along. Achilles is like the Prodigal Son rather than like the good son. In the Iliad, other characters are much better men than Achilles and do much more good than Achilles; Nestor and Odysseus come to mind. Yet they do not change from bad to good, and so do not attract us as much. In the movie "Casablanca", several characters are better than Rick and do much more good than Rick all along, such as Rick's old girlfriend, Else (Ingrid Bergmann), and her husband, who is a key figure in the resistance. Even the French policeman is better than Rick in general. We are not as fascinated by the consistently good characters as by Rick the changed person. In the Tanakh (Old Testament), David is really a reformed bad boy with a lot of the old bad boy still around. Here is not the place to go into why we are more fascinated by characters who change into better people than by people who are good along. I don't know how long the idea of a reformed bad boy or girl has been a theme in Western and Hebrew literature, and how widespread the theme is outside of Israel and the West.

The idea of a reformed bad boy or bad girl shows up now in many ways, many of the ways are not good, and how we treat the idea is not always good. First, rather than focus on the good acts and the change in character of bad boys and bad girls, we are fascinated by the bad part. We romanticize the bad part. We cling to the bad part. The badder we were, the better we are, and the better we will be. This attitude shows up in later chapters, so keep it in mind. Second, we wrongly think everybody can change and everybody has a good person waiting inside to come out. In the movie “Knocked Up”, the bad boy, Seth Rogan, changes into a good respectful respectable responsible husband and father, even though, in real life, that change does not often happen as women want. Not everybody can change, and not all of us can be saved. This situation too shows up often enough so you should keep it in mind. For a movie that is more PC “gender distributed” and shows many of the other themes too, see “My Super Ex-Girlfriend” with Uma Thurman and Luke Wilson.

### **Code as Game.**

Hopefully this poem “The Lost Master” by Robert Service is out of copyright:

“And when I come to die” he said,  
 “Ye shall not lay me out in state,  
 Nor leave your laurels at my head,  
 Nor cause your men of speech orate;  
 No monument your gift shall be,  
 No column in the Hall of Fame;  
 But just this line ye grave for me:  
     ‘He played the game’.

So when his glorious task was done,  
 It was not of his fame we thought;  
 It was not of his battles won,  
 But of the pride with which he fought;  
 But of his zest, his ringing laugh,  
 His trenchant scorn of praise or blame:  
 And so we graved his epitaph,  
     ‘He played the game’.

And so we, too, in humbler ways  
 Went forth to fight the fight anew,  
 And heeding neither blame nor praise,  
 We held the course he set us true.  
 And we, too, find the fighting sweet;  
 And we, too, fight for fighting’s sake;  
 And though we go down in defeat,  
 And though our stormy hearts may break,  
 We will not do our Master shame:  
 We’ll play the game, please God,  
     We’ll play the game.”

Toward the end of the movie “Conan the Barbarian” starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, Conan has to face a horde of expert fighters sent by the evil wizard Thulsa Doom, and Conan has for allies only three friends. Conan says, long after this fight is over, what people will remember is not that good faced evil, or that ordinary people faced a wizard and his minions, but that a few faced many. People will remember the battle, not why it was fought. I understand but disagree. What matters about D-Day is not that Allied casualties, in the first wave of the assault, were nearly one hundred percent; what matters is the battle was for the future of the world, the right side won, and the right side fought rightly. Dedication to the game is laudable but dedication to the right principles in the game is much better.

To live by a code is to play a game. Genet, the doomed souls in “No Exit”, Arjuna, Krishna, Achilles, and, Chris, Yul Brynner’s gunfighter dressed in black, all play a game. This poem extols commitment alone as sufficient cause to praise a comrade. But that is not true. What the poem does not make explicit, but what we assume, is that the game was not a really bad game, even if it was a rough game, and might have been a good game. The fallen comrade played “the game of life”, and we assume that is always a good enough game. Then we might take commitment alone is good enough. The necessary unspoken background questions are: What kind of game really? How do we play it best? The Iliad makes clear that Achilles plays the wrong game at first. We make a mistake if we play the simple game of “make your own code and be true to it” that Sartre offers in “Genet”, and if we turn the game of justification offered by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita into a game of rationalization and excuse. The best way to get clear is to compare specific various codes, games, types of people, and situations.

I feel strongly the appeal of the kind of person praised in “The Master” and the appeal of his commitment to the game over any mere tokens of winning or losing. The master does not appeal to me just because he plays any game. The master appeals to me, and to his followers, because he plays a particular kind of game, and he has the character (“true you”) that goes along with commitment to that kind of game. This kind of person was valued when I grew up in Oregon. I don’t point out what kind of game it is or is not; most Americans can figure that out by looking at what the master does values and does not value. The kind of game in the poem is not only one particular kind of game such as soldier, hunter, prospector, or dedicated worker for goodness. This kind of game is really family of games. The games in the family might seem less on the surface than the obvious game of the poem but really are just as important if we commit to them and their values, and play them fully: parent, husband, wife, good child, good citizen, honest business person, and honest politician. This game cannot be one in which the fighting is valued only for the sake of fighting without also paying attention to what you are fighting for; it cannot be a game for mere killers – you can save that for video games.

When most people think playing a game well is enough regardless of the content of the game, really they do care about the content but not as they wish people to know. They seek to live in the kind of made-up games that allow them to feel good about themselves. They play at games that their culture says are worthwhile so they can feel justified, regardless of whether they personally have considered the value of the game. Usually they superficially play at superficial games derived from more serious games. They get lost in glorious losing; they play the demon-haunted reluctant hero. They see themselves as warriors out to protect the “hood” rather than as thugs or racists. They see themselves as poets trapped in cruddy jobs, who make life worthwhile by going to hip places on weekends. They see movies about warriors in a last stand against “the man”. They see TV shows about long-suffering abused victims. They dream of

being a Klingon dying a glorious death in battle whether the battle is fought between the stars or in a dysfunctional household. The way out is to examine the game, and not to assume that, just because you play a game approved by some subculture, you are automatically justified. “Hate the game, not the player” is just an excuse for self-indulgent rationalization. If the game is silly, then so are you. If the game is good, you stand a better shot at being decent, although, whether you make it, does depend on how you in particular play.

Here I can only repeat what religions have said about just wars for millennia: If you are in a good game and you play it according to good principles, then fine. If you are in a good game but you play it along bad principles, then you are wrong. If you are in a bad game, but don’t know it, and you play it as best you can according to good principles such as decency, then you are alright. If you are in a bad game and you know it, then get out, regardless of what principles you play by. If you are not sure about the game, try to find out; if you can’t find out, then play by good principles. If you are in a good cause, and you want to play by good principles, but the people on your side, or your enemies, play dirty, then you have a hard problem, and I can’t settle it here. You get the idea, and should do what you can.

### **Duty and Honor as Good but Inadequate Principles.**

Arjuna and Achilles lived by a fighter code. Thankfully, the American military knows quite well that the fighter code is not enough. The American military usually live by a higher code that includes duty and honor. Arjuna also lived by the code that the modern American military would understand, including duty and honor. Achilles came to understand that code, and more. Duty and honor are good values. There is nothing wrong with them. It is hard to live by principles such as “work hard to make the world better”, “pay it forward”, “do unto others”, “applies equally”, “responsible adept citizenship”, “the greater good”, “rule of law”, and “put office before person”. Rather than try to live by those principles, isn’t it good enough to live just by duty and honor? Aren’t those good enough? If you personally really can’t understand more than duty and honor, they are enough. But if you can understand more, then they are not enough, and you have to try to live by more, as, eventually, Achilles did.

Although we might not recognize it, Americans debate this question in our popular culture. We are apt to put it in terms of revenge-and-justice as with the Hulk and the Punisher. This issue includes movie characters such as the man with no name in the Clint Eastwood “spaghetti” Westerns. It includes the undercover police officer, and the spy, who have to become like the bad people he-she fights in order to fight them. It is the dilemma of Donnie Brasco. Duty and Honor sometimes require revenge. In pursuing revenge, sometimes we have to become almost as bad as the people we kill. If we do become that bad, then we have betrayed the honor and duty we set out to advance. We have to be able to put honor and duty into a greater context or we are likely to lose them in pursuing them. At the same time, we do have to stop the bad guys, and we need honor and duty to find the strength to stop the bad guys. This is a real issue for which there is no simple solution. The fact that we continue to debate it, even if in the popular media, is a good sign. Tyrannies do not debate this issue.

### **Principles and Judgment.**

Having a code implies strongly adhering to the rules of the code, as with a soldier or detective. Strongly adhering to rules without judgment usually undermines principles, and kills the empathy and sympathy

that are at the basis for most correct principles. Even if you don't have sympathy for bad guys, you do have to have sympathy for the good guys that the code ultimately means to protect, such as in the movie "A Few Good Men". Finding sympathy guided Achilles to a better code with better principles. Relations between principles and judgment are a large topic that I don't go into here. If a code consistently lacks sympathy and consistently hurts good people, then it is using wrong principles or is following rules without also using judgment.

### **Theory and Practice: Literary Cases.**

It is easy to say we should use "applies equally" and the Golden Rule as our basic principles but that is not the problem. Nearly everybody agrees in theory on these as basic principles. The problem is that these grand principles need to be interpreted and broken down into smaller rules for specific cases, and people quickly disagree at that level. That is what we should expect with animals that evolved their sense of morality. "The Devil is in the details". People are just doomed to argue about codes and behavior at the level of particular cases. We work out our humanity by arguing specific cases. This section presents a contrast between similar codes, in two more literary cases, to show we have real disagreements and that we have to think it out for ourselves.

In an episode of the classic TV show "Law and Order", a working class father wants his son to go to a prep school so the son can have a good education and good connections. The "preppies" look down on the boy, exploit his desire to fit in, and exploit his particular working class code of brotherhood. One clique fools him into acting as their stooge. The leader of the preppy boys gets the working class boy to kill a man while the leader looks on. The police figure it out. The preppy leader is happy to incriminate the working class boy to save his own skin. The police cannot act against the preppy leader unless the working class boy "rats him out". The working class boy refuses even though it means another ten years in jail at least, and even though he knows a bad person will go free. The working class boy is true to his code, which is based roughly on "do unto others in our group as we need to do, as an ideal member of our group would do for us". The working class boy is true to this code even though he knows the other person is not true to the same code, does not respect that code, and does not treat the working class boy as he would wish to be treated. The preppy leader is true to his own code if we take his code to mean: first save your own skin; then treat other people of your class as you might wish to be treated; and you may abuse people of another class.

Along with Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler is the best of classic detective writers. In "The Long Goodbye", the hero, Phillip Marlowe, makes friends with a man named Terry. Terry once had a good basic character but lost it through dissipation. Terry gets in trouble and then disappears without saying goodbye and without explaining. Marlowe feels it is his duty to find out what happened and to help Terry if he can. Marlowe hunts him down. In the process, Marlowe gets abused by police, gangsters, and assorted bad people. Marlowe learns that Terry disappeared in part because of his bad character. When it is clear to powerful people that Marlowe will not give up, and he might make too much trouble for big people along the way, the people who arranged for Terry to disappear arrange for Marlowe to meet him. When Marlowe meets him, Marlowe tells Terry what an ass he is, and then leaves. The powerful people who hid Terry assumed Marlowe went through hell because he was loyal to Terry personally. Marlowe did like Terry personally despite Terry's faults but that is not why Marlowe found him. Marlowe went through hell because Terry was a friend, regardless of his personality, in the same way an American

soldier tries hard not to leave a fallen comrade even if the comrade is an ass. Marlowe was loyal to the idea of friendship rather than to the particular person who might happen to be in the category of friend. Marlowe did his duty in a code in which he expected another friend would do the same for him as a friend, regardless of whether he deserved it as a particular individual. Marlowe did it for who Terry ideally was, and might have been, not for the real Terry.

I think the working class boy was wrong and Marlowe was right.

### **It Takes All Kinds.**

When faced with annoying behavior, my father used to say, “It takes all kinds to make a world”, usually to hide the fact that he had no idea what was happening and what to do. If everybody acted according to high moral principles, the world would work out fine. When some people act badly, the other people, who want goodness to prevail, often have to abandon their high principles except among themselves. Then, we need tough guys, self-righteous guys, bulldogs, muscle, shooters, schemers, persuaders, whiners, and even lawyers. We need vengeance, anger, retribution, punishment, and fear; and we need the kind of people who can do that. The people who can do what needs to be done sometimes don't have hearts of gold and love sweetness. Sometimes it is only a lucky accident they are on our side. All these kinds can serve as the basis for a code.

Even when people don't act badly, people don't spend most of their lives acting according to high moral principles, nor should they. Not all codes are basically moral. People have regular lives. We have to go to work and mow the lawn. People just do things. Being a good mathematician might be governed by a code but the mathematician's code isn't necessarily moral. We don't always respond according to a code based on high moral principles. Sometimes we don't respond according to any code. Sometimes we just respond. As long as we don't break high moral principles, all this is fine.

### **Natural Codes.**

Western people want their codes to have deep roots in nature and human nature. We want the validation of nature for our personal way of life. If we want to live the code of a “brave heart”, it would be good if the code of a brave heart had roots in our past as hunter-gatherers and helped in the evolution of morality. Western people like thinking of ourselves as the noble savage.

Unfortunately for our longings, few codes have such a pedigree. Few codes are simply natural. No code in modern life has simple roots in our evolved nature and only there: tough guy, avenger, femme fatale, tough woman, gangster, soldier, professional, business person, clergy person, professor, activist, techie, teacher, farmer, etc. None of these people existed as such in our evolutionary history. Hunter-gatherers did not have soldiers, farmers, priests, or feminists. Even if we could twist our history to find a basis for these people in the past, that is not the same as a warrant for a code in the present.

We have made up our codes out of a combination of natural abilities, culture, society, history, economics, politics, etc. It is hard to decide which dominates. It is not likely that any other force could go against evolved human nature for too long but that does not mean some kind of pure human trait is the key to any particular code. We evolved a general ability to play particular games, and no particular game could go

against our evolved nature for any long. We can understand some aspects of some games on the basis of evolved capacities, such as that golf might be based partly on an evolved joy in hunting and gathering outdoors. But, when we want to understand a particular game, we are much more likely to find what we seek in the history and cultural background of the game. We learn more about golf from knowing it began among shepherds in Scotland, spread around the world with the American military, and is often played by aspiring members of the middle class. Similar analyses work with codes such as the code of politically correct people or religious fundamentalists.

Sometimes the best we can hope is a code that has a basis in an attitude with roots in our evolutionary history and that does no wrong. The super hero as a fighter for the underdog, defender of morality, and scourge of bad guys, might have roots in the tendency to moral indignation of our past. The good parent certainly has roots even if what it means to be a good parent changes with time and place. The faithful spouse definitely has roots in our past.

Even here we have to be careful because not all of our tendencies that have close ties to our evolutionary past are good. The Black Widow, Prostitute, Cad Seducer, Spouse Abuser, Unfaithful Wife, Unfaithful Husband, and Killer all likely have roots in our past but we do not want to teach our children how to make lifestyle codes out of those characters.

We can look for simple personality types and for simple attitudes that make sense given our evolutionary history and that are useful today. We can make codes out of tendencies. Hunter-gatherers did not have soldiers but they did have men and women who would fight to defend their families and groups and who would argue vigorously for right. Out of that we can make a good template for soldiers who serve a good policy. Our ancestors took care of sick and injured people, and gave hungry people food. Out of that, we can easily make roles for medical personnel and for people who work in charities. The modern "artiste" did not exist among hunter-gatherers but people who could draw a picture, blow a tune on a flute, sing a song, chip a good stone spearhead, or weave a colorful basket were respected and did well. Out of that we can imagine modern singer-songwriters or even Mad Men.

Whether a code has roots in our past does not matter as long as the code is fun, useful, makes the world more interesting, does no harm, and gives people a regular way to get by in the confusing modern world. If the code also makes the world better, follows moral values, and promotes moral values, then so much the better. Let people live a regular life according to their "true you" as long as it does no harm. That is a good code too.

## 07 Romanticism

Romanticism is the dominant stance in the West, and, thanks to pop media, likely the world. Briefly: it glamorizes the world and it gets people to trust emotion, ideology, attitude, role, and crusades rather than reason. Romanticism gets people active in mid-level causes such as against abortion and thus stops us from dealing with deep issues such as chronic unemployment. Romanticism began in the middle 1700s and replaced the Enlightenment. Almost all of us now look through biased Romantic eyes. Romanticism is one of the most powerful of “systems that eat the world”. I disagree with Romanticism. I regret that it replaced the Enlightenment. I write more about Romanticism outside this book.

From about 1700 through 1850, the rise of capitalism, industrialism, machines, science, and democracy, overwhelmed old institutions and opened the door to new ideas. Traditional religion did not catch up with changes soon enough to offer ideas and institutions for the new world. Romanticism did, and it “set in”. After it had set in, no alternative has been able to displace Romanticism. The cure for Romanticism is to know deep issues and to offer realistic ideas and institutions for dealing with deep issues. Until we can offer that to people in general, we should expect middle level issues to recur, people to run around “acting out”, dogma, attitude, demagogues, fads, and glamour. Neither the left nor right is close to facing deep issues and to offering realistic solutions.

### **PART 1: Introductory Notes**

#### **What Romanticism is Not.**

Romanticism is not the romantic imagination and is not romance in novels, movies, and TV. Romanticism is not necessarily charging against canons, “Valentine’s Day” writ large, chivalry, dark “Gothic” stories, or TV shows about the grandeur of the universe. I like romantic imagination; I try to be romantic but fail; and I dislike Romanticism. Romanticism as a culture system is related to Romanticism in the arts from about 1780 to 1930, but it is more than art, and Romanticism thrived after Romantic art faded. Nearly all “art” or “classical” music from Beethoven after 1800 to at least Rachmaninoff in the 1920s is Romantic.

During Romanticism, the West has had other movements. In academia recently, the most familiar might be post-modernism. In pop culture, there is no big movement that is not basically Romantic. All “space epic” movies at least since “Forbidden Planet” are Romantic, as are crime movies since “Public Enemy”. Romantic music influenced rock-and-roll, pop, country, and hip-hop. Even revivals in traditional religion, such as fundamentalism, are as Romantic as they are orthodox. I see nearly all modern movements as variants of Romanticism. Romanticism can make and subsume them even when they are not compatible with each other. They cannot overcome Romanticism, and Romanticism always returns after a variant has had its run. Lesser movements can be interesting, fun, and have value just as “art” jazz and movies about fairy tales are interesting, fun, and have value; but we don’t have to take lesser movements nearly as seriously as mainline Romanticism. We are still in Romanticism. So I ignore variants.

Romanticism can seem like a gigantic pouting whining adolescent carried on into adult life. It might have roots in pouting childhood, as did Anakin Skywalker, but is more than that, as Darth Vader became more. To a righty, Romanticism seems like the typical lefty who sticks his-her nose into everything and always has a plan based on dogma; but Romanticism is more. Romanticism infects people of the left and right equally. Romanticism might be more obvious in lefties but it is as active in righties. The Tea Party is a Romantic movement. Republicans since Goldwater, and especially since Reagan, are Romantics. You can be a Romantic as much by always saying “small government”, “unleash the market”, and “tradition” as by shoveling money at minorities. To self-styled practical hardheads, Romanticism of the left or right seems like airy-fairy silliness; but it is more. The ideas of supposedly practical people are as much off-the-mark and unrealistic as leftie fantasies. Refusing to see real capitalism, denying the pain of nature, constant economic develop as the cure for all ills, militarism, and calling for “the market alone” are as airy-fairy and selfish as communes of the 1960s. America as the new Israel bringing “the American way” to the world and restoring law-and-order at home, are Romantic. The business person’s dream of being a great innovator and empire builder is Romantic. I do not on purpose show how Romanticism infects righties as much as lefties but I do try to offer examples from both sides.

### **Method.**

Romanticism shares almost all its features, such as seeking adventure, with other stances, the greater Indo-European culture, and with other cultures. Some features of Romanticism seem to come right out of evolved human nature, such as upwelling emotion, although features are always shaped by conditions. Romanticism stands out by how it selects and uses features. I don’t define how Romanticism is unique. You will get a feel for it. Romanticism is like Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism. All three are Indo-European and express general tendencies in human nature. Despite similarities, it is wrong to see all as variations on one, for instance, as variations of Hinduism. Romanticism interacts with ethnicity, religion, gender, and socio-economic class. In a Romantic system, all socio-economic classes are Romantic but in different ways. I can’t sort out all these topics here.

I write as if ideas in Romanticism caused behavior. Most of the time, it is probably the other way around: people want to act in some ways, and Romanticism provides a good rationale. I can’t sort out how ideas and behavior interact, so I take the typical stance in anthropology and continue to explain by reference to socially shared ideas. Terms that begin with big letters (“Spirit”) show ideas that were raised to a high level in Romanticism, and often began with capital letters in Romantic writing.

To explain Romanticism, it is useful to write as if it were an ideal culture-social-formal system (much as what Max Weber made), and compare it with other ideal systems such as slash-and-burn horticulture, feudalism, capitalism, orthodox Christianity, and Hinduism. To do this, for reasons of brevity in a chapter that is already huge, I have to overlook many problems in social science. If you know of the problems in working with idealized systems, then good, but don’t hold it against what I say here if I do not take care of apparent problems.

Romanticism is a mixture of human nature; Indo-European culture; social patterns caused by the rise of nation states, industrialism, and capitalism; and particular historical trends. A book on Romanticism might try to tease apart these forces. This chapter cannot. It would be fun to show how the human need to see the world as lively contributes, and how it meshes with the feeling that something is wrong even under

apparently successful capitalism, to lead to ideas of Empires and rebels; but that fun adventure cannot be part of this chapter. Try working it out for yourself.

### **A Bit on What Romanticism Is.**

The major deistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have always wanted people to go out and act on the world. Jesus wanted to usher in the Kingdom of God, wanted people to act as if they lived in the Kingdom of God, wanted us to work hard to make a better world, and wanted his followers to “talk up” other people. I follow Jesus in urging us to work hard to make the world better. Romanticism is a bad distortion of this good activism. While people in Romanticism might not intend badness, the results of its distortion often are wicked.

These days, even people who hold to traditional religion often are as much Romantic as they are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Taoist. In this section, I do not discuss the relation of Romanticism to standard religions. I do not assume simply that the decline of traditional faith led to Romanticism or the other way around. I do assume the decline of traditional faith and rise of Romanticism are related.

Modern people want to feel Justified and Saved as much as any traditional Jews, Christians, or Muslims. We want Faith. We want to feel that our daily lives are sacred enough. We want to feel our lives matter and we have added to the world. We want our lives to have a feeling of adventure. We want feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment. We want to feel as if we have contributed to a grand cause, and that our contribution made a permanent difference for the better. We want our inner nature to match the bigger nature of the world and for that match to make a difference for ourselves and the world. We want all this to add up to having Faith and feeling Justified and Saved.

Not often can people really contribute to a grand cause in a way that makes an obvious difference and still live normal satisfying family lives and professional lives. Romanticism is a system that gives people a sense of success in their normal lives and spiritual lives, for the modern world.

Romanticism might have begun around the time of big causes such as the American Revolution, French Revolution, and socialist communes, and it still tries to work through big causes such as Communism, Fascism, the Great Society, and Saving Nature. But most of those big causes failed, succeed only in minor ways far behind schedule, or had unforeseen bad effects.

Romanticism might have begun in part to deal with big problems such as the good and bad of capitalism, political changes such as democracy, relations between business and the state, race relations, relations between major religions, and the need to save nature. But so far we have not cured any. Our attempts to cure them have created unforeseen bad effects and created additional bad problems.

Within the big causes and big problems are problems that are still big enough but “littler” in comparison such as Voting Rights, Civil Rights, Gender Rights, education, pollution in one particular place, bad race relations, religious conflict, abortion, prayer in schools, immigration, guns, etc.

People did not give up the need for Faith, Justification, and Salvation and the need to work in a cause so as to get Faith, Justification, and Salvation. People use alternative ways to see them, and use substitutes to get them.

One substitute was to put emotion above reason and to sanctify emotion. People use in emotion the way that traditional religions use Faith. Emotion is the new faith. If people feel the right emotion strongly then they are “with God”, Justified, and so Saved. Along with sanctifying emotion, people denigrate reason, including science.

People turn to “littler” causes for substitutes. “Littler” causes can still be important. People treat “little” causes with as much fervor as big causes, and hope for as much Justification, Salvation, and Satisfaction from little causes as from big causes. Commitment to any is a kind of special kind of emotion and so is the same as Faith. If you throw yourself into a cause, then you have Faith. We treat a battle over a bus stop like World War Three. A victory over the toilet seat is the same as the victory of Michael over Satan. We treat the argument over abortion like Armageddon.

People use dogmas for substitutes as long as the dogmas don't get at basic deep issues. They cling to these ideas as dogma: the sanctity of all life all the time; “choice” both in personal arenas and as a dogma of false capitalism; heaven or hell only; pure total populist democracy only; rule by the rich for the public good; materialism; determinism; the soul is eternal; back to religious fundamentals; liberty, equality, and fraternity; moral relativism; moral absolutism; moral subjectivism causes all problems; the market cures all problems; etc.

People use glamour as a substitute. They glamorize standard things such as movie stars and fashions but they also glamorize ideas, dogmas, causes, and all the other substitutes below.

People take attitudes as substitutes. An attitude also is a kind of emotion, and so also is equivalent to traditional Faith. People hold an attitude as a substitute for connecting their small self to the bigger-than-me, for acting naturally, and for Justification, and Salvation. Attitude includes willingness to jump into causes and to intrude. Left or right, the attitude comes first and pushes people into causes. Causes enact the attitude and so make the attitude real and effective. Causes are not chosen for their merits but for their ability to make us feel good as we push our attitude onto the world. Having an attitude makes you into an embodied angel, that is, a mix of spiritual and material who does the will of God and who has good results on the world. People “act out”.

People take on roles and poses, with attitudes. The most common roles are “Rebel” and “Remnant”; for which see the chapters on issues and see below. People divide up ideas, attitudes, causes, poses, and roles into “real” and “fake” much as people used to divide up religion into belief in orthodox religion and belief in heresies or divide faith from works. A real attitude, role, etc. is rooted in genuine connection to spirituality and a helpful cause.

People want their lives to feel adventurous, somewhat dangerous, and somewhat thrilling. To feel this way makes us feel Passion and makes us feel as if we are doing something important.

People want to act naturally and spontaneously. They want their attitude, works, and the effects of their works to flow naturally from their deep selves. They want life and good effects to come naturally as golf, baseball, or tennis come naturally to some gifted athletes or math came naturally to Isaac Newton and Leonard Euler. This makes them feel connected from the small to the big. It validates what they do and makes serves as a substitute for Faith.

People turn to belief with a strong emotional component whether within traditional faith or on its own. The standard examples are cults, Beats, hippies, New Age, Indian religions, and punks. People also take this stance of Passion in revivals within traditional religions, fundamentalism of all kinds, seeking spiritual gifts as in charismatic groups, and in movements within major religions such as Methodism and Mormonism. People conduct political causes as if the causes were a religious cult; a common example is Marxism and Communism in Russia (Soviet Union) and China. People even throw themselves into abstruse academic movements such as post-modernism.

People learn how susceptible people-in-general are to Romantic ideas, and the first people use the ideas as dogmas to get what they want for other reasons. People use emotion, take attitudes, act out, put on glamour, take on the image of rebel, moral remnant, victimized minority group, victimized business group, and victimized middle class, to gain special consideration.

As part of this complex, modern people excuse and enable far too much bad behavior and bad people. The worst of the bad behavior and bad people I discuss in the chapter on decency. Badness includes thugs, criminals, rudeness, strident political correctness of the left and right, pushiness, holier than thou, cults, hypocrisy, and anti-hypocrisy. Bad Romantic behavior includes terrorism, including evil done by Christians and by non-Christians such as by Muslim terrorists.

The underlying big problems are still there. Because the big problems are still there, many of the "littler" problems cannot be solved such as gender relations and race relations. We can take steps to deal with some little manifestations, such as by securing voting rights in the 1960s, but the root problem keeps shooting up in other places in other ways.

The fact that we won't deal with root problems puts us into a self-supporting "system that eats the world". Because we don't deal with the root problems, and the symptoms recur, we always have "little" issues to work on. Because we always have little issues to work on, we don't have to deal with the big problems. We can keep our complex of emotion, attitude, causes, roles, and bad roles.

For a "littler" cause to serve us this way the cause does not have to succeed fully. If it did succeed fully, we would move on to another cause. It is better if the cause keeps us busy, like the never-ending search for good race relations or gender relations. Causes that seem worthwhile but never succeed are more useful than causes that do succeed fully. So it is fortunate for the system that people can work on never-ending little causes that keep them from solving big problems.

Despite taking attitudes and working tirelessly on causes, modern people seem selfish, materialistic, and trendy. People are restless but forever dissatisfied. Their dissatisfaction makes them more restless, and that fuels the complex.

The worst effects of Romanticism are to blind us to what really needs doing and to keep us from using our energy, time, and talent most usefully.

We refuse to look at the big problems. Through the work of scholars and thinkers, we now understand the big problems better and might be able to do real work on controlling them – as with climate change. But we are so used to overlooking big problems, taking an attitude, seizing one little issue after another, and finding satisfaction this way, that we can't see real solutions, keep perspective, or work on problems in the order of their real effects and real need. We can't order the little problems under the big problems, and so cannot deal with everything most effectively. We would rather run around like headless chickens and get little satisfactions for short times.

Romanticism gives people a lot of energy. Romantic energy is not all wasted on projects that can't be completed. People have accomplished much using Romantic energy. Without Romantic energy, we would not have movements such as for civil rights, gender rights, saving nature, the Conservative revival, and research cure cancer. For all that, I am thankful.

Romanticism also has hurt us, and it has blinded many able people who should have seen better and had better lives. I have seen a lot of suffering from Romanticism; "the needle and the damage done". It has kept us from dealing with the root issues so that now it is too late to deal with some root issues such as saving the abundance and diversity of nature.

Romanticism always fails. In a longer work on Romantic logic, I would show how its apparent failure really supports its ability to persist as a system even while its long-term failure makes it less able to serve deep human needs. Here I only say that Romanticism does not solve deep problems or littler issues. Romanticism does not give people long-term satisfaction. Romanticism leads to conniving, confusion, contortion, and bad dogma. Still people continue to hope emotion and commitment lead to Justification and Salvation.

In practice, on the state level, Romanticism is another level of control. Acting according to Romantic guidelines, people can think they are fighting the machines when really they are reinforcing a more subtle and pervasive machine. Groups in power learned to let subordinates agitate along Romantic lines so the subordinates would think they are doing something important but really they change nothing or they help groups in power. Examples include anti-abortion, women's empowerment, widespread welfare and other entitlement, small-scale national medical care, gun rights, gun control, hug a tree, rock-and-roll, hip-hop, Black Lives Matter, White Lives Matter, and most trends in the social sciences. People in power did not invent Romanticism as another level of control. They are not that gifted. They are astute enough to use an ideology when it arises and can help them keep power. If you want to escape this level of control, you have to think for yourself, see real issues and real solutions, and then act accordingly.

Almost everyone wants some magic in the world, but not for everybody, only for some special people. The large majority of us cannot control magic even if we can see magic, like Bottom in "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Almost everybody wants to be one of the special people who can really feel magic and use it. People embrace an ideology that lets them be a magician. Most people want to be a good magician, like Merlin or Yoda. If there are good magicians, there have to be bad magicians, like Morgan Le Fay or the misguided Prospero in "The Tempest" and "Forbidden Planet". But that is alright because

then good magicians have something to do to feel useful and justified. They can defeat bad magicians. They have to protect ordinary people who are not adept with magic. They can protect goodness-truth-light-and-love, and help in the advance of goodness etc. In the end, it works out. In the modern world, bad magicians always ally with the King and Queen, the “system”, which also is bad, not like good King Arthur. Bad magicians and bad powers thwart the Spirit moving through the world creatively beneficially reshaping it. Magicians are prime tools of the Spirit. They help the Spirit creatively beneficially reshape the world. In the modern world, bad magic consists of knowing how to succeed in business, applied science, politics, nasty glamour, or systematic religion – mostly all that rational, technical, and impersonal stuff. Good magic shows itself to most people first through art such as pop music and through good emotions such as caring, true patriotism, and love for nature. Just as bad magic can feign goodness, so good magic always has a touch of naughtiness; often that is how you tell it is good magic. When good magicians defeat bad magicians and power, they also unite the goodness of good magic with its naughtiness and with the power of bad magic, of course always in a good way. Good magicians always go to Heaven.

If you want two people who exemplify Romanticism, begin with the Frenchman Jean Jacques Rousseau from the middle 1700s, and commentaries on him. Second, read the German Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (G.W.F.) Hegel’s “Phenomenology of the Spirit” and early writings on Christianity, from the early 1800s. For a contrast, read Edmund Burke’s work on the American and French Revolutions from around 1800. Burke is the founder of the sensible conservative movement. For more contrast, but which shows the growing internalization of Romanticism, read: Gilbert Keith (G.K.) Chesterton “Everlasting Man”; Clive Staples (C.S.) Lewis “Abolition of Man”; Russell Kirk “America’s British Culture”, “Roots of American Order”, and “Conservative Mind: From Burke To Santayana”; a collection that Kirk edited called “Portable Conservative Reader”; and a collection of Kirk’s essays called “Essential Russell Kirk”. For the best critique of Romanticism, of all flavors, in a short wonderful novel, read “The Warden” by Anthony Trollope. The novels of E.L. Doctorow are a fun commentary on Romanticism in America. “Ragtime” describes well the maturation of modern Romanticism in the early 1900s as primarily a political tool.

I repeat that the best cure for Romanticism is to better know deep issues and to offer realistic practical solutions based on sound principles. Neither the Left nor Right has done this or accepted the situation. Until we do this, Romanticism and “acting out” will reign.

### **God to Fill the Void and Good Sense to Fill the Void.**

Briefly, I say that people face a void at the center of their lives; instead of filling the void by dealing with deep issues, people run around; and the running around sustains the void. People are caught in a self-sustaining system around a void. A traditional religious person would say that people can fill the void with God and can fill the void only with God – or Dharma, Tao, Heaven, Love, etc. The lack of God is the root of all problems.

I don’t dispute that finding God can fill a big void in human life. I don’t dispute that not having a sense of bigger-than-me makes it hard to fill the void. If that were enough, I would refer people to religious tracts or New Age makeover books instead of writing this. The problem is that the deep problems still remain after you find God. You feel good knowing God loves you but that does not find a job for everyone who is qualified and energetic. Finding God does not save nature, turn people into adept citizens, stop terrorists,

and save us from bad policy. Church announcements don't cure worldly problems. You still have to work on the world, and working on the world can make the void return fast. Unless we also get clear about deep issues in the practical world, we risk Romanticism. We can love God truly and still act like Romantic idiots or other idiots. We can love God truly and carry out projects not because it is part of God's plan but because we need to feel good about our self. Besides loving God, we need good sense. To get it, we need to get over Romanticism. Thinking by itself won't fill the void that only God can fill but you need to think about what to do after you find God or if you don't find God.

I do not say all emotion, causes, activities, ideologies, attitudes, and roles are simply Romantic foolery. Nearly all activities etc. have a lump of truth and usefulness to them or we wouldn't do them. Activities etc. can have value even when people do them for wrong reasons or fool themselves.

I am saying that we can fool ourselves even in a good cause. Even people who feel God strongly can be mistaken about abortion or fight abortion for the wrong reasons. People who feel the unity of nature can fight to save the salmon for the wrong reasons. People who think God made everybody in his image, everyone should be free and equal, and the state should not stick its nose into our private business, still can fight for gay rights for the wrong reasons. People who achieve real good in activities can do it for the wrong reasons. We still need to think. We still need to step back to assess what we do and why. We still need to mistrust causes, etc. We still need to seek deep issues vigorously and still need to assess our time, talents, energy, and other graces in that perspective.

I am not asking that people have perfect motives or be perfect. I am asking that people look at what they do in light of what I say here. The people on this planet are not doing well enough despite huge amounts of energy, a thunder of sermons, and sea of ink. We need to ask ourselves why and do better.

Few people on their own can even recognize deep issues. Fewer can see through to the bottom of deep issues. Fewer can see the relation of deep issues to other issues. Fewer still can figure out what to do. We need guides. I have had adept guides even when they disagreed. Hopefully this book helps. You are not expected to do it all for yourself. You are allowed to ask for help; and I think you will get it. After you have gotten what you can from this book, go to other guides for help.

## **PART 2: Background Ideas for the Romantic Attitude.**

We can see all of the points above as in the Romantic attitude. Romantics take the attitude with them to relations with people, nature, institutions, and society, and to issues. This part of the chapter goes into ideas that lie behind the attitude. I do not say that people have to clearly say they believe in any ideas described here. People only have to act as though they believe in these ideas, and they do that.

### **Selfishness, Isolation, Materialism, and Trendiness.**

It is useful to begin by pulling on what might seem a small thread. Religious critics of modern life say our life is ruined because people are isolated individuals, selfish, materialistic, and craven slaves to trends. Modern people can't get real satisfaction in life. They feel bad. They feel modern "angst". Selfishness etc. is a treadmill that modern people can't get off of.

To explain selfishness etc., religious critics say modern people are moral subjectivists and relativists; for definitions of those, see below. Modern people lack a sense of objective morality; they assume they each personally are the final arbiter in all issues including all issues of morality; they do what suits them and call that moral or useful. They assume that whatever their group does is moral. They allow that whatever another groups does is moral for that other group as long as it does not harm me-us, and expect other groups to have the same attitude for us. If they don't like what other groups do, they can call that immoral without too much need for justification.

To explain selfishness etc. and moral subjectivism, critics say modern people lack faith and a relation to God. Christians lament the end of Christian civilization based on the Church. Hindus might say people lack appreciation for the total Dharma including how it structures society while Chinese might lament the lack of ritual ties to Heaven. Without God, we cannot have an objective view of the world. Without God, we make ourselves the center of the world and make ourselves kings and queens of the world. We must be selfish and must seek satisfaction in material goods and trends.

To explain lack of faith in God, traditional religious people say modern people took up ideas that were new after about 1700 or 1750 and turned the ideas into bad dogmas. Not all the ideas are compatible, and that is part of the point. The ideas-dogmas make us "kind of crazy" because they are un-natural, un-Godly, and hyper-rational. You do not have to fully get the ideas to succumb to their bad effects. To turn the ideas into dogmas, it helps not to get the ideas deeply. The new ideas include: "liberty, equality, and fraternity"; the individual person as the basic unit of thinking, society, family, and life; the individual person as a separate autonomous agent in all spheres; the individual as isolated moral agent; the individual as an isolated economic agent; deriving family from the individual; deriving society from the individual; rights rather than responsibilities; absolute freedom; absolute equality in all aspects of life including political, religious, social, family, and sex; lack of feeling responsible for our fellows; absolute sameness between genders; society has a "general will" about what is right and wrong and about what is practically good; we should bow to society in all affairs because society has general will and knows general good; using "the greater good for the greater number" or "utility" as the highest goal; putting society above moral action by individuals; making society the basic unit of thought, acts, and institutions; capitalism; being wealthy makes one correct; being powerful makes one correct; the free market; no government regulation; much government regulation; strong populist democracy; and rule by a small group who knows the general will and general good better than the people, knows how to get things done, and represents the people.

Bad dogmas displace good ideas, good morality, and good institutions from Christianity. Bad dogmas inevitably lead us down dark paths to wickedness.

According to critics from traditional religions, these bad ideas came from science and-or from naughty philosophers from about 1750 to 1850. I do not explain in this section what features of science led to these ideas. I do not explain why people began to believe scientists and philosophers after about 1750 when people had hardly paid attention to them for many millennia before.

Recall from the chapters on issues that we can derive any nonsense from contradictory statements, and much nonsense has been supported by using mutually incompatible ideas from above.

Non-religious critics of modern life, especially leftist critics, also say people are selfish, materialistic, and trend slaves; but blame capitalism. You will see below how. Non-religious critics approve lack of faith in traditional religion. The critics encourage many ideas above. They do not see the ideas as bad dogma but as intriguing insights and good guides. In their view, problems come because society, or sometimes the individual, cannot reach full potential, that is, full utility. The individual and-or society are stymied by capitalism and traditional religion. Capitalism causes people to select among ideas those that are bad for society and themselves and causes people to actually follow the bad ideas.

Most sensible non-dogmatic people see that we have to compromise among these ideas, as for example, between rights and responsibilities and between individual and society. Righties and lefties each have their own ideas of what a compromise is and how to find it. So they are unable to compromise among themselves; American politics since Reagan is an example. Each side picks the ideas that suit its goals and claims the other side picks dogmas that do the most damage.

Populist democracy is a difficult case because people both want to have it and want to blame it. I say a bit about it below.

### **Some Terms.**

“Materialism” or “materialistic” can mean either-or-both of two ideas. Writers are not always clear which they mean. First, (1) materialism means a drive to buy a lot of stuff and seek happiness in stuff (including material goods such as smart phones and services such as a concert). It implies people are unhappy with buying as a life, but pursue it harder because they see no alternatives. Second, (2) materialism is the idea that the world is made of nothing but matter, and everything is only a re-arrangement of matter, including plants, animals, processes such as storms, feelings such as love, and sensations such as the scent of roses. In terms of high school physics, everything is an arrangement of electrons, protons, and neutrons (or quarks). (I omit the difference between matter and energy. I omit considering the status of the forms that matter takes.) For now, I care only about the first meaning. Sometimes critics blame the first kind of materialism on the second but (2) does not cause (1) very often.

“Consumerism” has two meanings. First, (A) people seek satisfaction from buying stuff. It implies that people can’t get satisfaction from buying, but have no choice, buy more, and are stuck. This meaning is like the first meaning of “materialistic”. The second meaning is almost opposite. (B) People are at risk in capitalism from bad business firms that offer poor goods and conniving terms, including financial firms. Consumers need help. “Consumerism” is helping consumers. Good versions of consumerism are the journal “Consumer Reports”, product reviews on TV and the Net, and stories against scams. Champions of consumerism include Ralph Nader and Senator Elizabeth Warren. When people blame materialism (1) on materialism (2), they also blame consumerism (A) on materialism (2). Because of how rightist thought works, people who dislike materialism and consumerism (A) rarely support consumerism (B).

Moral subjectivism says that each isolated individual, or each isolated group, can judge morality for him-herself or itself, and is the final judge of right and wrong. Nobody else can judge right or wrong; no other group can judge right or wrong. Moral subjectivism is rarely clear on the relation of groups to individuals. People and groups who claim to be final arbiters are rarely clear on relations of groups and individuals.

Moral subjectivism and doctrinal subjectivism go together. Moral subjectivism and doctrinal subjectivism lead to fracturing of groups, denominations, sects, and cults. They fractured Hinduism and Christianity. They constantly fracture the left wing so the left wing often defeats itself, or, if it does not, allows the right wing to defeat it easily.

Moral subjectivism leads to both moral absolutism and moral relativism. On the one hand, we have a plethora of groups each of which insists it is dead right and all the others are dead wrong. On the other hand, not all of them can be right, and they all have to get along somehow. It is easy to say they are all right in their own way for themselves and there is no one overall objective right and wrong. It is hard to compromise. Which horn of this dilemma wins out depends on particular histories and situations. Both extremes hurt democracy.

Romanticism is able to use moral subjectivity, doctrinal subjectivity, moral absolutism, and moral relativity all at the same time to strengthen itself.

### **The Complex-System-Syndrome of Romanticism.**

I do not minimize the bad effects of isolation, selfishness, materialism, and trends. I hate people walking around with ear buds oblivious to the human world and traffic. As a motorcycle and bicycle rider, I hate people who drive and use phones. But I don't think explaining entirely by moral subjectivity, pride, lack of God, science, capitalism, weird philosophy, or populist democracy is satisfying. I look for deeper relations that might tie all this together better.

Regardless of ideology, evolved human nature tends to self-interest, using material goods for success and fun, and paying attention to what other people do. The extent of self-interest, etc. varies. Whether self-interest etc. become selfishness etc. depends on way of life and on particular conditions within a way of life. Our evolved nature has not changed even if our acts are more aimed at selfishness etc. now. Even if our acts are more aimed at selfishness etc. now, it is not clear how much – I think not much. We have more toys and trends now than in Medieval England, and we can hide in apartments clicking on the Net, but that does not mean we are vastly more selfish etc. Read the satirists of Classical Rome, and read Chaucer or Boccaccio; they are still funny and accurate, and people do not sound much different. Individualism is a part of Hebrew-Jewish Law, and Western heritage, and has been a key value since the rise of democracy in the 1700s. It is integral to democracy. I doubt critics would like to blame selfishness etc. mostly on the rise of democracy.

Ideas of strong individualism, social domination, moral subjectivism, moral relativity, etc., and the ideas of science that might support them, are more common now than they were in the middle ages but the ideas have appeared before and did not cause chaos. They were known in ancient Greece and Rome and did not cause chaos. When they arose before, they came in times when people had many ideas of God and no one idea dominated. It is not clear that not-having-a-clear-dominant-idea-of-God alone caused moral subjectivism etc. in those times and so I doubt is the only cause in our times. It makes more sense to say that great turmoil in any times cause confusion in faith etc, and then to look for turmoil and the reasons for turmoil. It is interesting that selfishness etc. are more common now but we need to see if deeper reasons cause selfishness etc.

Science, capitalism, and widespread populist democracy are almost unique to our times, and they are part of large changes that began in the early 1700s. Antecedents for capitalism, science, and populist democracy all have appeared before but none developed into a full-blown socio-economic system as now, and at no time before did they all appear together strongly enough to reinforce each other as now. None alone caused selfishness etc. But coming together in times of turmoil, with ideas in Romanticism, likely did. I cannot prove my view. I have to offer a plausible account of how it might have happened, how it relates to Romanticism, and how Romanticism relates to selfishness etc.

I am less saddened by selfishness etc. than by the Romantic complex, by the fact that we obsess over a plethora of “littler” issues and do not think through to the root. Some self-interest etc. are part of human nature but they do not have to be part of a complex that keeps us from dealing with the real problems of our world. Not even selfishness etc. have to be part of that kind of complex.

Briefly, what happened is what I mentioned above: Changes had been building since at least 1600, got faster after 1700, and much faster after 1789. The changes included capitalism, science, a mechanistic reductionist style in science, individualism that went along with capitalism, individualism that went along with populist democracy, populist democracy, religious divisions that undermined the natural authority of traditional religion, new religious ideas, and new ideas in philosophy that I don't go into. Old institutions could not cope with the new situation. Traditional religions did not adapt fast enough to give people ideas and institutions that would allow them to live decently in modern life and to keep the old ideas of God, decency, responsibility etc. At the same time, the ideas in Romanticism came to the fore. The ideas in Romanticism blended with capitalism, science, populist democracy, new forms of authoritarianism, and other new ideas and institutions, to form a system. It is a strong system that “eats the world”. Once in that system, we have a hard time getting out. The system even absorbs and shapes traditional religion and conservative ideas to serve it. The extent to which we are selfish etc. and moral subjectivists etc. varies with conditions within Romanticism but the variation never takes us out of Romanticism. That is where we are now.

Whether ideas in Romanticism were latent in the culture and only came up again after 1750, or developed new in response to the period, I don't go into. I believe they were latent in old Indo-European culture.

Contrary to what critics and old people say, modern life is not all that bad. Contrary to what I say, even Romanticism is not all that bad. It can be a lot of fun. We get a lot of good work done on middle level issues such as gender relations and clean air. I love gadgets and pop culture. How selfish etc. life is under Romanticism depends. In America in the 1960s, people were not too selfish; in the 1970s and 1980s “me generation”, more so; less in the 1990s; more so again in the Republican 2000s; and maybe less again in the early days of the Obama Presidency.

Romanticism works best when people are always a bit skeptical of their institutions, as they have been since the rise of populist democracy. Yet, even in Romanticism, especially in it, people always see the ideals of service and selflessness, and gladly act well when they believe enough in their institutions and think their actions do lasting good. People act more selfish etc. when they feel their institutions fail them much and that good acts toward other people do no good or even backfire. Regardless of how selfish or selfless, what people do serves to reinforce Romanticism.

People distrusted their institutions, even democracy, during the time when Romanticism consolidated its power, in the early 1800s, and that distrust led people to adopt Romanticism. After they had adopted Romanticism, the extent that people trusted or distrusted their institutions varied but never undermined Romanticism. Romanticism is compatible with both distrust and modest faith in institutions as long as some distrust remains. The modicum of distrust in institutions helps keep us from looking clearly at deep issues and fixing them. Romanticism feeds the distrust that keeps it alive. Our times always lead us to distrust our institutions enough to provide a solid base for Romanticism.

To repeat: the real problem under Romanticism is that we do not pay attention to deep issues and that, as a result, we are sliding into a world where life is like what we find in "Third World" cities such as Manila, Lagos, Mexico City, Mumbai, Bangkok, Los Angeles, and Oakland, CA; and where people will always act a bit too selfish, materialistic, and trendy.

It is too much to look at all the factors that fed development of the Romantic system-complex-syndrome, and at all the factors that feed it now. I focus on capitalism and the ideas about the Spirit that lie behind Romanticism, with passing comments on other factors. I explain how Romanticism works to support itself and to keep us in it.

### **Why Not Populist Democracy?**

I said in Chapter Two on political values that populist democracy is failing largely because we will not face deep issues; clearly Romanticism plays a role in that failure and so populist democracy and Romanticism are linked. Populist democracy lets people think they are acting on deep issues when they are not. It lets people think they are heroes when they are not. Under democracy, people feel the failure of institutions because they create the institutions; only the people who made the institutions can fix them; but won't. All the dogmas listed above are part of democracy. During the era of democracy, I think Romanticism became stronger, if we can judge by how it pervades pop culture, how it has fueled the American culture wars, and how it has shaped American politics.

Why, then, go at the problem of Romanticism from capitalism rather than from populist democracy? A good answer involves a lot of social science, which I avoid. Briefly: Capitalism came before democracy and enabled democracy. Without capitalism, there would be no modern populist democracy. We can't know modern democracy well without knowing capitalism. The same ideas about individual, selfishness, subjectivism, moral relativism etc. are evident in capitalism as in democracy. If I use capitalism as one way to explain them, then I might as well simplify and get what I need from one approach. Despite its failures, people don't want to see anything bad about democracy. Only a few conservatives are skeptical about populist democracy as I am, so, if I use democracy, then I will get little support and much resistance. Since 1980, after several recessions, and after gaps in wealth became obvious, people are more skeptical of capitalism now than when Reagan gave it as the dogma of God. It is easier to explain the categories of analysis with capitalism than with democracy. I can use capitalism with fewer problems.

### **Idealized Good Community Subsistence Agriculture.**

To begin, it helps to contrast idealized capitalism with idealized self-sufficient farming. Although idealized self-sufficient farming never existed, we think it did, and we use it as the model for how we want life to be

and how we think life really would be if only bad things did not stand in our way. We find things to blame when life does not turn out like this.

Imagine a large area of farming families, all families nearly all the food they need, and, amazingly, also produce nearly all they need such as wagons, lanterns, books, and computers. While the Amish are not nearly this self-sufficient, still, imagine along those lines. Particular families can specialize in some goods that they make well, and trade among each other, such as cakes for candles. Specialization and trade do not undermine self-subsistence. The families can produce a surplus above what they need, which they sell on a market to buy goods such as computers. If the market suddenly disappeared, they would feel inconvenienced but they would still get along fine.

Because each family is an independent unit, we might think each family acts as an isolate by itself but this is not the case in real life. In fact, just because families don't need each other, and they do specialize and trade, they interact and form a community.

The end result is something like the ideal farming communities and small towns of American lore or the idealized peasant communities of social science lore before about 1990: Smallville the home of the Kents and Superman; or the birthplace in Iowa of Captain Kirk. People trust because they have nothing to gain from stealing or otherwise hurting, and they have enough to lose by cutting ties through bad behavior. They need not all go to church (temple, mosque, etc.), or to the same one, but, in fact, people do go to some church, and usually the community has only a couple. The children go to a few small schools. They play on sports teams and in sports leagues together, and against the teams of other similar places. Life is interesting. They all help each other out in emergencies. Not everybody is equally wealthy but everybody gets along and everybody succeeds enough. A teacher of mine used the term "warm puppy school of anthropology" for the social scientists who really thought rural social life was like this. Middle class people, especially in suburbs but also in some urban neighborhoods, think of themselves and their community in these terms.

It might seem that subsistence supports isolation, moral subjectivism, etc. but it does not. Ideally, it is the other way around. People in communities share the same morality, and that morality closely approaches to the one real objective morality. People need to hold similar morality to trade, marry, and not to hurt each other; and they settle on the one best true morality. The fact that economic and social relations drive people to one morality, the one true morality, does not mean we can reduce morality, or the one true morality, merely to economic and social relations. It just means, that, in this case, society and morality happily coincide.

In their own eyes, the biggest reason that a population of self-sufficient farmers can be self-sufficient, autonomous, yet not isolated, and tied into one moral-economic community is because the basic unit of social life is the family rather than the individual or any big subgroup. Families are made of several generations. Family members learn the best balance between individual and group, and they teach it automatically. Families learn about division of labor, and learn about the need for everybody to pitch in. They teach responsibilities more than rights. They teach taking care of people who can't take care for themselves. Because families can't marry within, each one family has to consider relations with several other families. The relations overlap so that, in a few steps, nearly all families are tied to all others. The same is true of participation in the market economy. Few families have a member who is adept at every

skills, so some other families are better at some other skills, so it is useful to let another more adept family make wagons while we make lanterns to trade for wagons. In this way, the population is tied through a few steps altogether as well. The “family” becomes an important idea in morality and social relations. The family takes on an almost-mythic status. People have idealized visions of what a family should be like, work to make their families like that, want other families to be like that, and prefer relations only with other families that are as close to the ideal as possible.

Of course, the reality is in between. Where people don’t compete directly, the success of one person-or-family does not detract from the success of others, and where people can gain from mutual help, relations can be good. Relations are rarely communal. People always compete. People are never as friendly and helpful as the ideal. People cheat, lie, gossip, connive, backbite, and swindle. People flaunt wealth and use it for comparative advantage such as to get better marriages for their children. Some kind of socio-economic class system often develops. People share much of the same morality but still differ and still have moral disputes – not just disputes about economics, marriages, and self-interest but real moral disputes about right and wrong. The community might approach the one true morality but it rarely closely, and two different communities made of self-sufficient people might have different moralities that approach the one true morality in different ways. Judgment is still needed and still a skill to cultivate.

The actual conditions that prevail in any place depend on all the factors that I usually list: geography, climate, ecology, economy, technology, culture, history, and previous social organization. Some rural places are nice and some are mean.

People use the idealized rural community not just to contrast with capitalism and to explain the changes in capitalism but as a subconscious model of all aspects of how we wish life was but is not. It is like the way that early movies imagined that Native Americans used the idea of the “happy hunting ground” or like I imagine our hunter-gatherers ancestors dreamed of happy hunting-and-gathering grounds. People want their family, office, business, factory, labor union, school, academic department, sports team, community center, country club, and community to be like the idealized rural community. People use the fact that these arenas in their lives are not like the idealized rural community as way to indict modern life and to blame what they want to blame. We would be better off if we could see these arenas as they really are and work to make them better as what they really are. One of the tragedies of Romanticism is that it does not let us see these arenas as they really are and make them better that way but keeps pushing us to see them as unreal ideals and keeps us dissatisfied and active as a result.

### **Idealized Bad Selfish Capitalism.**

Here briefly is the idealized nasty capitalism of simplistic social science. This picture has more than a grain of truth to it no matter how much you dislike simplistic social science and lefties.

Every person and business firm is in it for him-herself or itself and only for the isolated self. We are all isolated selves and only isolated selves. All isolated persons and firms interact with any other isolated self, person or firm, only for narrow personal gain. The rest of the badness necessarily follows.

Each person has wants. He-she uses available resources to fill wants as efficiently as he-she can. If you live in the forest, you use a gun and ax to hunt and gather what that particular forest gives. If you have a

job in the city, you use your salary to buy what you want in the order and amounts that give you the most gain. Business firms make goods for people, and do so efficiently, but only for profit. Whatever makes a profit happens; whatever does not make a profit, no matter how morally good, does not happen. People get jobs at firms; with their salaries, people buy the goods that firms produce.

Together people and firms make a closed system. The system provides for material wants and for trends to chase but it does not offer any more and it actively deletes any more. Rather than church or saints, people take the business firm as their model. Just as business firms seek profit and nothing else, people grimly seek personal satisfactions and nothing else. Just as business firms do not help any community unless it serves their particular narrow desires, people do not. More than merely self-interested, people are isolated, selfish, cold, and coldly efficient. They don't help others. People think that the success of everyone else detracts from their own success, so they view everyone as a serious competitor and treat everyone that way. They can be superficially polite as a means to an end but there is nothing to it other than that. The only human bonds are based on the model of a contract among business firms. Parents, children, and spouses all begin to see even each other that way. Nobody can form real bonds. Nobody can think that there might be something more to this closed system such as God or morality except when they use God or morality as a tool to manipulate other susceptible people.

People are selfish rather than merely self-interested. People can't get satisfaction from human relations because they don't have the ability and because other people don't have it either. So, instead, people seek satisfaction from buying stuff, usually material good such as cars and smart phones. People can't get satisfaction in the long run that way either but can in the short run, so they keep doing it. Trendiness is an extension of selfishness, materialism, and the first kind of consumerism. People can't get long run satisfaction from knowing all about the latest fad but they can get short run "kicks" so they keep doing it. The lack of long-term satisfaction does not make the system break down; it makes the system all the stronger.

Capitalism generates some serious problems such as unemployment and unemployment, adds to socio-economic class conflict, and adds to other conflicts such as racial strife. It is a strong force in destroying nature. Capitalism does generate wealth and eventually improves the lives of most people but the very wealth that it generates can be a problem in itself. Wealth corrupts. Wealthy people jealously guard their wealth. Even middle class people use wealth to distort politics. People believe in wealth rather than God, Dharma, or Tao. I go into the problems of capitalism more elsewhere in the book so I don't go into them anymore here.

Most of us are familiar with the syndrome that I label "just get mine first". In social science, one common example is called "the Tragedy of the Commons" and the syndrome is often modeled by a game called "Prisoner's Dilemma". When a big problem looms, especially if people share resources, people often do NOT respond by pooling resources-and risk and rationally communally fighting the problem to get the most for all. Instead, people grab what they can for themselves, hoping to get enough to weather the problem, and then come out alright at the end – or at least better than their fellows. Everybody trying to grab what he-she can makes the problem worse, but that is not the concern of most people. We can see this syndrome now in the demise of nature. People buy their own plot out in the forest hoping to get away from it all, and then, when enough people have bought enough plots, the forest is gone, and the "get mine" people get landslides and fires instead. Usually market "bubbles" such as the housing crisis and

“Great Recession” after 2006 have “get mine first” as a strong contributor when the bubble builds and when it collapses. Financial firms and their human operatives certainly are astute at getting their loot first on either swing of the pendulum.

Capitalism makes this syndrome worse. Capitalism generates, or enables, problems that people try to get away from such as the end of nature, class strife, and market bubbles. Capitalism gives the average person enough wealth so he-she thinks he-she can get ahead of the problem, get his or hers, and then get out “sitting pretty”. In fact, people are wrong and make the problem worse, so the wealth of capitalism works against people rather than for people.

Economically isolated individuals are almost inevitably moral subjectivists. Although it might appear that they are like self-sufficient farmers, the end result is quite different. For each economically isolated individual, only that person knows what he-she likes; nobody else can decide for him-her; and he-she cannot decide for anybody else. This attitude transfers directly over to morality. They know what is right and wrong, and only they know. Other people may hold opinions as long as their actions don't impinge badly on me; when their actions do impinge badly on me, then they are necessarily wrong and I am necessarily right. If a lot of opinions about morality happen to coincide, then that is a happy accident but no more than a happy accident. It is not the basis for a community. We might use it as the basis to form a group but our group is not cohesive in the same way as a community. When our opinions no longer coincide, we part company.

Reality differs from lore. Evolution gave us a desire for relations with family, people, community, morality, and spirits. People do not usually see everybody as a grim competitor for the same job; a mid-level clerk in a chemical factory is not competing with a mid-level clerk in a university. Because of modern travel, apartment life, and the isolation of jobs in a big bureaucracy, people do feel isolated. But people reach across boundaries to interact with co-workers, go to churches, go to recreation centers, experience art, listen to music, work in causes, and start families. People can get real satisfaction from material goods and activities. Firms can provide the means to get some of this real satisfaction, both by providing people with jobs and by providing them with the goods and services that people but with their salaried. Some job-and-living situations are nice and some are mean.

People do pursue careers as individuals and people sometimes do feel they are in a “zero sum game” where they gain only at someone else's expense and someone else gains only at their expense. But people also feel they are in it together as when a whole firm succeeds or the capitalist system as a whole delivers the jobs and goods that people need. People do not pursue a career in a vacuum but almost always have a career in a firm, government unit, or academic unit. Business firms cannot produce goods willy-nilly and force people to buy the goods. Firms need customers; they have to please their customers. Business firms even need other firms such as suppliers and consultants. Where competition is not head-to-head, people have feelings of cooperation and achievement. I have seen competition between business people that is friendly like sports as long as the business people are not in direct competition for a very limited market.

I am not sure if “get mine first” is worse in capitalism than in other socio-economic systems. I doubt the underlying natural propensity is much worse among people in capitalism than other systems; I have seen selfish conniving people in rural areas and non-capitalist markets. If the syndrome is worse in capitalism,

then it is not much worse. It is bad because it has worse results in capitalism than in other systems. The fact that it can have worse results in capitalism is not the fault of people in capitalism and does not mean they are more selfish, materialistic, or trendy but is a fault of how the whole system works, especially within nature.

Capitalism is important not because it forces people into selfishness, materialism, and trendiness, even if it does push people in those directions sometimes. Capitalism is important because it generates some of the deep problems, such as unemployment, that support other problems, such as bad relations among ethnic groups and genders. Capitalism generates some of the deep problems that we won't deal with and it reinforces some of the lesser problems that keep us busy flitting among causes and so keep us from dealing with deep issues. Capitalism supports Romanticism and can seem to be a big cause of it. But I doubt capitalism alone could cause Romanticism. Once Romanticism is in place with capitalism, then it pushes tendencies in capitalism toward selfishness, isolation, materialism, and trendiness; and it is a bigger force for those bad feelings than capitalism. If we would face up to the big issues then capitalism alone would not fuel other issues and we could avoid Romanticism.

### **Individuals and Teams.**

In lore, people in capitalism are necessarily narrowly selfish, mean, and grasping. Natural selection made sure we are self-interested but not necessarily mean and selfish. Usually the most successful people in our evolutionary past learned to reach out to, and work with, other people around them so as to promote everybody's self-interest and mutual interests. The degree of cooperation or selfishness depended on circumstances and here is not the place to go into how that works. In my experience, unless people are locked into a bad system, they do find ways to connect with other people.

In lore, people in capitalism are isolated individuals who cooperate with other people only as a means to their own success. People rarely require other people for success in capitalism (or not the full range of humanity but only some aspects of a person such as his-her math skills). Because people in capitalism see everybody else as a competitor, people act as isolated individuals and never cooperate. They never form teams except to the small extent that a team directly helps individuals to make short-term goals.

Again, reality differs. Except in bad situations, people like to act in little teams. The team is usually the unit of action, not the lone-wolf isolated individual of tough guy movies and the villains such as Tom Little (Voldemort). People leave teams when they get cheated and when they do worse than if they struck out on their own or formed another team, but people will put up with a lot from the present team before they go. Americans are supposed to be the most individualist of all peoples but, in fact, they insist on teams as the unit of action. Most of the sports that Americans care about are team sports. We won World War Two through team action. Guerillas have prevailed against America because they formed good teams. The Japanese learned to emulate American teams and did really well in business. Super heroes make teams such as the Justice League. Batman and Superman were a team. Americans like to think of their families as teams, and to think of teams as families.

All team members do not have to hold exactly the same morality but their morality has to be similar. The members of the Justice League are heroes, and do not join the bad guys, because they share the same morality. For a sports team, it might be enough all to want to win a title but for most human teams more is

required. Even people on sports teams need camaraderie. That “more” appears in the common goals and morality of teams.

A team is like a small community. The ideal of a community is like a big team. A community is looser than a team. I don’t want to draw the distinctions now; I do want to point you to the similarities.

We have three possibilities: isolated individual, team, and communal-honeybee-like society. Reality can lie anywhere on a continuum between the extremes but very rarely at the extremes. People can want all three at the same time. People have ideas about all three. In the same life, people can be in different situations that require a different response. Ideas can differ from the situations that people are in. All this leads to conflict. We will see examples of the conflict in Romanticism. How Romanticism handles ideas about the individual, team, and community, and handles conflict, shows its nature as an ideology system.

### **“The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism”.**

In a book of the title above, Max Weber, in the late 1800s, explained capitalism partly as the result of ideas that Protestants earlier had developed for religion and then applied to the new commercial life that grew up after about 1650. The ideas that helped make Protestantism and capitalism also helped make Romanticism. The ideas that Weber describes reinforce the image of capitalism as only selfish and materialistic, and, ironically, they help explain how traditional faith in God dwindled. The ideas are not all consistent. I do not point out inconsistencies. The inconsistencies in the Protestant ideas also are in Romanticism but I don’t usually point that out either. I have one quibble with Weber that is worth noting: the ideas were typical not only of some Protestants but of many Roman Catholics too. People accepted the ideas where people gathered for commerce almost regardless of their faith. The ideas helped people succeed in the new commercial life of the time. If the ideas had not helped with the new commercial life, people would not have adopted them as quickly and deeply as they did.

People seek Salvation. To be Saved, people need to be Justified. People cannot earn Salvation or Justification. People have Faith in God. God then grants people with Faith Justification and Salvation. It is not a matter of enough Faith, although having only a little Faith will not do. You cannot force God’s hand through quantity of Faith. It is through God’s Grace, and only through His Grace, that you can get Justification and Salvation. You cannot do anything to earn Justification, Grace, and Salvation. Not good works, power, wealth, piety, acts of piety, giving to the Church, being an official of the Church, or anything else can earn you Grace, Justification, and Salvation. To think they might earn Justification and Salvation through works would be to think a human can compel the Will of God – a serious blunder. The keystone is Faith. You must have Faith. If you do not have Faith, you can have nothing else. If you do have Faith, then likely all else will follow. Exact relations between works, Faith, Grace, Justification, and Salvation were never clear.

Protestants sought Grace, Justification, and Salvation as individuals. You could not get these from any institution, not even the Church. You must have a direct relation with Jesus (or God). A group of Christians gathered together might help each other but, in the end, these were matters between the individual and God (Jesus). The individual had to develop the best ways of seeking God, opening the way for God’s Grace, and so getting Justification and Salvation. People actively sought a personal relation with God (Jesus).

People went on a Spiritual Quest to find Faith and to open their hearts to God. The Spiritual Quest first required people to give up themselves, their selfishness. After giving up yourself, then you can find Faith. Then you can find everything else. When people could get away from themselves, then eventually they could return to themselves and to God, and find everything, more than they had lost, that is, find Grace, Justification, and Salvation.

Protestants seek to dedicate their lives to God. Protestants feel Called by God. They answer a Calling. In following their Calling, they Profess God, they are Professors or Professionals. In the past, a calling to God usually was a calling to service and-or a church office such as pastor. However, a person could now dedicate his-her occupation, and his-her life in his-her occupation, to God. One could be a "tin smith for God" or a "banker for God". To do so, a person had to follow the occupation by strict moral standards, as recommended by John the Baptist.

Because Protestants who felt a Calling to God through their occupation and were supposed to be honest, they were good to do business with. Especially Protestants who did business with each other often did quite well at business. They were materially successful and had social standing.

Protestants began to see material wealth and social standing as Signs of Grace, Justification, Salvation, and going to Heaven. People respected successful Protestants not just as successful in affairs of the world but in affairs of the Spirit. People began to seek wealth, power, and standing not only for their intrinsic value but as Signs of God's Grace. People began to emulate the manners, wealth, power, and social standing of Protestants so as to signal God's Grace and so as to gain the benefits of wealth etc. and of God's Grace.

Although each individual was responsible for his-her own Salvation, people could help each other. Even in the Spiritual Quest, people always did better when they worked with other people as part of a team. Protestants formed tight-knit often closed communities, and communities could be large, as they were in Switzerland, Scotland, and the American Midwest. People found success not as isolated individuals but as part of teams (Professions, Occupations, Firms) and as part of communities.

In doctrine, each Protestant is an individual responsible for his-her own salvation but I personally have seen Protestants take pretty much the opposite attitude. They get quite concerned about the quality of another Protestant's conversion and his-her personal relation with Jesus. They don't only question each other, they grill each other. A person does not have an authentic conversion and authentic personal relation with Jesus unless the rest of the community ratifies the experience and relation. One group disparages the experiences, relations, and institutions of another. I do not here judge. I do point out that this situation is confusing and can allow people to emphasize different things according to the group and according to their needs.

When it suits their needs and they can get away with it, Protestants emphasize individual autonomy in religion, business, politics, and life. When it is forced up on them, when they can gain from it, or when they can use it to control other people, Protestants emphasize the group. There is no resolution to this tension and it shows up in all aspects of their lives. I don't know what Roman Catholics do but I have seen something like this among these as well, probably not as severe.

In seeking all this, forming communities, and acting honestly in business, Protestants created the ideal social background for capitalism. Protestants transferred their ideas of God, morality, person, and church from religion-and-church to commerce-and-firm. They saw their occupations, and later business firms, as Professions of seeking God. They saw their firms as another Quest for God in which they had to give up first in order to get more later on. They saw the success of their firms as signs of God's Grace. They carried out their Professions, their businesses, with ruthless efficiency so as to increase the Glory of God. They acted in teams and communities. People who act like this are likely to succeed in business. They see business in ways that leads to the creation of business firms and the development of individual people dedicated to success. What began as the withdrawal of the individual into poverty to let God find him-her ended as a community of dedicated business people seeking wealth, power, and standing.

We have two shifts. The first is from the Protestant Ethic to the Spirit of Capitalism. What caused the morality that is pertinent to community to become the morality of hard-nosed business? Mostly because it worked. People that did this succeeded. People imitated the people who succeeded. Later apologists for business and religion then offered rationales. A good account would require more but here we don't need more here. I do note that this kind of shift is common in successful religions and in successful ventures of all kinds.

The second shift is from the Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism to Romanticism. In Romanticism, Faith became emotion and emotional commitment to a cause. The profession became the project, especially the cause. Commitment has to be strong. The cause has to be about the world and had to have real effects in the world just as the business enterprise had to be in the world and had to have real effects in the world. People are individuals but they are part of teams who together do God's work. A cause can fail as a business can fail but that does not mean the cause was in vain or that the overall work of God will fail. We all still have to keep working despite our individual failures and the failure of any one particular cause. Acting honestly toward God became acting as a real person and not in a role or as a poser. Other particulars fall into place.

What caused the shift from seeing in terms of the Protestant ethic etc. to seeing in terms of Romanticism? I explain the history a bit below. To see clearer, we need to know two other parts of Romantic ideology, the Spirit and Creative Chaos.

### **PART 3: Cultural and Mythological Background to Romanticism.**

#### **The Spirit.**

In a time when religious leaders fear widespread atheism and amorality, it might seem odd to insist that few people are really non-religious. People try to find the beliefs that allow them to pursue success and that make their daily lives seem sacred enough. People seek beliefs that allow them to avoid hard issues while they still work toward success. That is what Romanticism does for our world. That is why people believe in Romanticism even when they don't say so. People are not a-religious, they are religious in a new way rather than as in traditional medieval Christianity. This is a reason why I do not blame modern angst on lack of faith alone.

The core idea of Romanticism is “the Spirit” and a chief helper idea is “Creative Chaos”. I do not say all people openly profess the Spirit and Creative Chaos. I only say people act as if they believed. The end result is the same and it reinforces the system just as well.

The Spirit is like God but is not the God of Christianity or any major religion. The Spirit is like the energy (mind, self, spirituality, consciousness, love, or dharma) that infuses the world and makes the world what it is but also stands above the world. The Spirit is both the form of the world at any particular time and the evolution of particular forms. The Spirit is the form of the whole world over time as the world takes on particular forms at given times. Most Christians who think they worship the official correct God of formal Christianity really think of God more in terms of the Romantic Spirit. When people say they are “spiritual but not religious” there is a good chance they reject formal religions but embrace the Spirit that I describe here even if they cannot say in detail that is what they believe.

The Spirit made the world. The world is the playground of the Spirit. The Spirit unfolds itself in the world over time. The Spirit does what it does through particular material and spiritual conditions including us as material-spiritual beings. Although the Spirit is non-material, it uses material stuff for its ends such as biological organisms; and it uses material-based stuff for its own ends such as cultures, ideologies, and science.

We are the Spirit acting through the world. The Spirit plays out its desires through us. Sometimes we are the agents of the Spirit in this world.

As the world goes along, the Spirit reveals more of itself. The Spirit is never entirely revealed at any one time. Yet, to people who can see, the Spirit is partially revealed at all times. At any one time, one nation, religion, race, mind set, world view, culture, business, moral movement, culture, political movement, art, or any institution might embody the Spirit and might best embody the Spirit.

The unfolding of the Spirit through the world is done as a series of projects: the Big Bang, the making of stars and planet systems, the evolution of life, the evolution of sentient beings, invention of agriculture, Classical Greek and Roman civilization, Judaism, Christianity, science, various art, nations such as Egypt and China in their times, and various kinds of political institutions such as divine kingship and populist democracy. The Spirit shows itself in the world through its projects. It is not always clear to me which projects are of the Spirit and which not. Usually at any one time, there is only one leading project of the Spirit, and the lead project shows up in several ways at once including art, nation, and government type. During its time, the leading project guides the whole world. At one time Israel was the guiding nation of the world because it taught belief in one ethical and powerful God. Americans think America is now the leading nation teaching American pop culture and American style democracy. The projects of the Spirit became the causes of Romanticism.

It is good to do the work of the Spirit. People feel good when they do the work of the Spirit. The Spirit likes when people help unfold its work. The Spirit likes when people contribute to the culture, business firm, labor union, etc. that is the vanguard of the Spirit in our times; people know that; and people feel good when they do contribute. People seek the vanguard of the Spirit and to do its work. The Spirit is more tolerant of opposition to its plans than most human people are but, after all, the Spirit has to move, the Spirit will win (“Thy will be done”), and opposition to the Spirit must be cleared away. People dislike

opposition to the Spirit, actively fight opposition, and put it down. If an old order opposes the Spirit, it must be overcome. To oppose an old order in this case is to actively do the positive progressive work of the Spirit, and it makes people feel good to know they do this. It feels being a good rebel to do the work of the Spirit. The Spirit is like the idea of “Dharma” in Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism.

The situation is as if the Spirit were a playwright writing a never-ending series of plays. Each play is a work of art in itself. Each play has to be known in its own terms. No play can be reduced to any other play. No play can be reduced to any set of themes although, of course, the plays show themes and teach us how to act. We are the characters in the plays. It is not clear if we are actors who show up in more than one play, as in reincarnation, and I don't need to settle that issue here. The Spirit works his-her art through us. We are the means by which the Spirit works his-her art, and likely the only means by which the Spirit could work his-her art in this world. We have some leeway in how we interpret roles but we do a lot better when we perform our role in accord with the spirit of the play we are in at the time. Other lesser playwrights, mere nature or mere humans, write some plays, those plays might be great in their ways, and we might act in them; but, in the end, none can rival the plays of the Spirit.

Some people think the Spirit is Love that infuses and drives the world at all times through various forms of the world, each form is a local modification of the same underlying Love, Love makes particular forms in their time, and Love breaks forms when their time is over. Some people think Spirit is Power, Progress, Justice, Complexity, Self-Awareness, Art, Creativity, or Emotion. A philosopher might say the Spirit is none of these exactly but can show itself as any of them either in a particular project-episode or through several project-episodes. We can only know the Spirit fully when it reveals itself to us fully for its own ends, that is, when the Spirit extends its grace to us.

The Spirit is closely tied to Creativity, Life, Being, and Being Genuine. What is of the Spirit is Creative, supports Life, has greater Being (is more Real), and is Genuine; what is Creative, Living, Real, and Genuine is of the Spirit. What opposes the Spirit is fake, imitative, empty, and deadly; what is fake, empty, imitative, and deadly opposes the Spirit. The apparent creations of bad beings are only imitations of the much greater creations of the Spirit. The best people are those who participate in the Creation, Life, Being, and Genuine-ness of the Spirit; the worst are those who merely imitate the Spirit and so fool people in to Bad Destruction, Emptiness, Unreality, and Bad Death. Artists and Rebels are good people of the Spirit. Politicians and the advocates of outmoded and-or false religions are bad. Unfortunately, I cannot take up these major themes of Romanticism, how they play out in daily life, and how they support Romanticism as a system that eats the world.

### **Creative Chaos.**

I introduced Creative Chaos in earlier chapters about issues. Creative Chaos is the disorder that prevails before something new and better arises. It is the headache that artists get before they suddenly see the light. It is the trees before we see the forest. It is the free market that brings what people want to people, and provides raw materials and workers to business firms. The Spirit uses Creative Chaos to build new forms and destroy old forms before building new forms. Sometimes Creative Chaos is called “underlying vitality”, “underlying force of life”, or “spark of life”. Before it was politically incorrect, people identified it with “the brown races” or the lower classes.

Because the Spirit uses Creative Chaos to do its work, people also feel good when they can find Creative Chaos and when they can identify with Creative Chaos. They like to be the blender that stirs up the new tasty drink. They like their group to be the embodiment of Creative Chaos for our times. They like their movement to be the movement that stirs things up, sets things right, and starts a new pattern. Rebels think of themselves not as simply destructive but as Creative Chaos. People think of marginal groups such as the criminals, artists, ethnic groups, the underbelly of society, and small religions as the Creative Chaos in the vanguard. They think the ideas for a new society come from these groups. They like to think of themselves as in one of these groups, or like to identify with one of these groups, because then they have an excuse to be a little rebellious and destructive and because they think of themselves as creative as well. People take on the airs of one of these groups so they can think of themselves as destructive in a good way and so creative. It is also an excuse to be bad-ass and selfish.

People who want to preserve aspects of the socio-economic-political order can also see themselves in the vanguard of the Spirit and as agents of Creative Chaos. Newness does not arise from out of the blue without any background. Newness usually rearranges old parts that were already there. Newness is re-order, not entirely new stuff in new order. At one time, the old order was the vanguard of the Spirit, did serve the Spirit, and was good. It hardly makes sense to throw away entirely what was once the tool of the Spirit and was good. It makes sense to preserve it and use it in a new better way. People who do this are the real rebels and the real vanguard of the Spirit.

### **Romanticism and Some Judeo-Christian Themes.**

Romanticism borrowed from Christianity and re-cast Christian themes into its own terms. Most themes originated earlier in Judaism. Please see the story of David, to Creative Chaos, rebels, and the Remnant in the chapters on issues. We now see themes primarily in Romantic rather than Christian terms, and we even see Christianity in Romantic terms. The "Spirit" is God (Yahweh) recast, or, as Romantic thinkers might say: "the Spirit revealed itself to Hegel after it had hidden in the Jewish-Christian idea of God for a long time". I think the Church Fathers would see Romanticism as yet another heresy built from Christian ideas and they would condemn it. In its time, Christianity borrowed ideas from Judaism and recast them in its terms. Medieval Christianity did the same to early Christianity. Here, I note only three themes. These themes are so successful because they also come from human nature and not only because they began in Judaism and were developed by Christianity and Romanticism.

God works through rebels. At any given time, only a small group can see the impending work of the Spirit clearly enough and so do the work of the Spirit on Earth as it should be done (nobody ever sees all the work of the Spirit in perfect clarity). The rebels must overthrow the old outmoded order. The rebels have to lead those willing to following into the future, into the new anticipated (promised) order. Abraham was the first such rebel. Moses might have been the biggest rebel and set the mold. David continued when he overthrew Saul and set the stage for the building of the Temple and for Temple Judaism. Jesus was a rebel and led a band of rebels to a new order. People who are called to be rebels for the Spirit should never ever give up

God does not only work through rebels. Sometimes the most important work of the Spirit is to maintain what was built painfully in the past, and to use tried-and-true features (ideas) to keep people in touch with the Spirit and so ready to do more work of the Spirit. Sometimes the Spirit needs conservatives. The

mass of people eventually forget about the Spirit. Then the true rebels of the Spirit are the people who remind everyone else about the Spirit and bring everyone else back to doing the true work of the Spirit. Then, the true workers of the Spirit are the Remnant. They are the Jews who returned from the Exile in Babylon to restore true worship of Yahweh to the fallen Jews. They are moral revivalists. People outside the Rastafarian movement think of them as simple destructive rebels but they saw themselves as the Remnant coming to restore the true just order of God. Blacks in America see themselves the same way; half the sermons in Black churches on TV are about the return of the Jews from Babylon and how they took their rightful place at the head of the nation. Jesus said he did not come to undo any Tanakh (Old Testament) scriptures but to fulfill every single one.

God chooses nations to work through. The Spirit chooses nations, cultures, art, philosophy, religion, socio-economic classes, economic systems, criminals, law-abiding citizens, etc. At any one time, one such institution represents the best work of the Spirit now. In particular, nations succeeded Israel when Israel refused to accept Greek rationalism and Christianity. Then Christianity and a parade of Christian nations became the New Israel. America thinks of itself as the present New Israel. Islam thinks of itself as the present New Israel.

The people who did the work of God in the past succeeded. The work of the Spirit will always succeed in one way or another. The people who do the work of the Spirit will always succeed in many ways.

The people who did the work of God in the past were entitled. Abraham founded many nations. Moses led his people out of Egypt, assumed the leadership of Israel, and saw the Promised Land. David got to be King. He and his descendants were judges over all the people of Israel. He and his descendants will judge all the peoples of all the world. When Nathan returned to Israel from Babylon, he got to judge the people and was rewarded with a place in the government. Jesus will be the king of everybody and will judge everybody. Peter was the rock upon which the Church was built, and, along with Jesus, he decides if a person goes to heaven or hell. People who do the work of the Spirit are entitled to feel special and be treated special.

#### **Anticipation: My Ideas, Dogma, Romanticism, and Conservative Ideas.**

I have said often that I dislike dogma. I say Romanticism keeps us flitting from one dogma to the other so that we cannot attack real issues. Conservatives also complain that modern people live by bad dogmas. I overlap with conservatives and I don't mind the overlap but I also differ. I see conservatives as caught up in Romanticism and dogmas as much as anyone; and conservatives would dislike that view of them. I mention this issue now so readers do not think what follows is just another conservative attack on modern life. I bring up the issue again later after we know more about Romanticism.

#### **PART 4: The Romantic Attitude in More Detail**

Again: People do not have to openly espouse the ideas in the Romantic attitude; they only have to act as if they hold the ideas; and they do. Romanticism is not consistent nor seeks it. One of America's leading Romantics, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in the early to middle 1800s, wrote something like "consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds". I neither point out nor try to resolve inconsistencies. Often they are fun.

I do not point out how Romantic ideas merge with ideas from capitalism, the Protestant Ethic, the Spirit of Capitalism, or anywhere else, to make modern attitudes of selfishness, materialism, and trendiness. I hope it is obvious from what I said above about capitalism etc. and say below. Sometimes I do make a specific point.

### **Lack of Good Clear Ideas about God and Morality.**

It is easy to say Romantic-like ideas spring up when people do not have good formal ideas of God and morality; Romantic ideas are poor substitutes for God and objective morality. Partly that is true. Lack of clear formal ideas of God and morality from traditional religion helped Romanticism get going. But, once Romanticism did get going, formal ideas from traditional religions were irrelevant. They would not stop Romanticism unless they told us clearly what to do in the modern world to compete comparatively. They would not be able to displace Romantic activity.

Besides, traditional religions are hardly clearer about God and morality and they do not address what people need to do now to succeed while feeling good about themselves. It misses the point to criticize the people-in-general as if they should all be educated priests. Under Romanticism, ideas about God and objective morality are not as clear as the ideas that a traditional priest might have (not always) but the ideas under Romanticism are about as clear as ideas people had in the past under traditional religion. "Jesus Saves" and "the Dharma" are not clear. The lack of clarity in traditional religions helped them to succeed in their times. Sharpness on some issues, such as abortion, might help recruit and hold some believers but do not sustain the religion as a whole. Ideas of the Spirit and spiritual life in Romanticism seem to be enough for people to pursue success and to feel their lives are in tune with God, especially when Romantic ideas merge with traditional religion.

If a traditional religious person insists people now don't have clear ideas of God and objective morality, why don't we? If the people in general ever held clear ideas from traditional religion, then why have we seemingly abandoned those ideas? Why don't we adapt traditional ideas of God and objective morality? What keeps those ideas out? Why do Romantic ideas "stay in our heads" better than clear ideas of God and objective morality from traditional religion? Why are Romantic ideas more satisfying in the modern world than traditional supposedly clear ideas of God and morality?

The lack of clear ideas of God and objective morality is the counterpart to not seeing deep issues and not seeking practical lasting solutions. The lack of clear ideas about God and morality goes along with not seeking deep issues and lasting solutions, to keep Romanticism going. It worked with traditional religions in their day too.

### **Causes and Activities.**

Because of when I first saw the Romantic complex, mid-1960s to early 1970s, I think in terms of political causes such as Civil Rights, feminism, repealing Social Security, and the Tea Party. A better term might be "activities" except "activities" does not get across the semi-religious fervor in Romanticism. People not only bomb abortion clinics but also go to aerobics, do yoga, do Tai Chi, diet, buy exercise equipment, watch football, learn the Macarena, wear penny loafers, take kids to soccer, go to flash mobs, condemn economic equality, attend mega-churches, and go to concerts. People do not merely engage in activities,

they immerse in causes. "Activities" does not get across the flavor of rabid PC. To keep the feeling, I use "causes" but please apply the same feel to all activities. I first saw Romanticism as much in Goldwater and Nixon Republicans, and in Christian revivals, as in the Civil Rights and Feminist Movements and New Age silliness. I participated too.

In using the terms "causes" and "activities" I do not necessarily imply any shallowness or that no good or harm comes. Seeking ethnic justice has been shaped by Romanticism quite a bit but it is a deep cause from which both good and bad has come. The New Deal was Romantic. Nazism was Romantic. Both major political parties in the United States operate as Romantic enterprises. I do not imply that people always-and-only "dabble" in causes although people do dabble. People can live by their causes, and do great good and great harm through living in their causes. In what follows, I use examples from American pop culture because they are vivid in the minds of readers. I do not entirely avoid strong examples such as the Tea Party and Black-ism but I try to work around them because they stir such emotion that people stop reading objectively. See the assessment at the end of the chapter.

### **Projects.**

"Project" literally means something like "positive going out from". The Spirit goes out from itself into the world of material stuff, ideas, culture, and history to create real things.

No one project every entirely captures all of the Spirit. Each project is only a finite selection from what is likely an infinite Spirit. There is always more to the Spirit than we find in any one project or any collection of projects. Not even the total historical progression of all projects is as much as the Spirit.

Each project is a thing in itself. Each project has its own logic (logos), reasons, order, goals (if any), feelings, method, ways, rhythm, structure, process, language, vision, art, etc.

No project can be fully understood in terms of any other project. Certainly no project should be judged in terms of any other project. A project should be understood and judged only in terms of itself, in the terms provided by itself. America should be judge by American standards; China by Chinese standards. White alternative progressive independent rock-and-roll should be judged by its standards; Black hip-hop by its standards.

To a large extent, projects are isolated from each other and insulated from each other. To the extent that individual people make their projects, and make their lives into projects, one individual cannot fully know and judge another individual, and individuals too are isolated from each other.

In particular, we cannot use Reason to bridge the gaps between projects.

Still, projects are of the Spirit, and, properly appreciated, lead back to the Spirit. So there is a way to get between projects: Passion. We can use Passion to appreciate, and participate in, various projects. It is not clear how much Passion allows us to participate in more than one project at once. If we are naturally in one project, such as rock-and-roll, it is not clear how much Passion can allow us to fully participate in another project, such as hip-hop. It is not clear how much we can use Passion to bridge the gap between individuals but Romantics seem to think we can use Passion to connect us fully.

Over history, it appears that projects of the Spirit get deeper and deeper. It appears the Spirit puts more of itself into successive projects, and reveals more of itself. Whether this is true or only an illusion of our times, is not clear. G.W.F. Hegel thought it was true. If it is true, the end result is a “culmination” of the Spirit in our time; for which, see below.

### **Faith, Emotion, Reason, Intuition, and Wit.**

Emotion is more important than Reason to the Spirit, and for relations of people with the Spirit, the world, and other people. Reason can be a useful tool of emotion but it is not as important. Sometimes I call emotion by the technical term “Passion”. Passion puts us in touch with ourselves, with others, the world, the projects of the Spirit, and the Spirit. Nothing else can. The Passion has to be real and honest but still it is Passion and not Reason. Passion is the Faith of Romanticism. If we have Passion, then we can get the other gifts of the Spirit. If we don’t have Passion, we can get nothing.

We can understand the projects of the Spirit as the Spirit using Reason to bestow its Passion onto the world. Passion uses Reason to act. Each project is a combination of Reason and Passion with Passion dominating. Each project has a typical Passion, or feel, that is the key to that Project. We feel French culture or the Renaissance as much as we can find specific criteria in logic.

True emotion can show up as anger against the enemies of the Spirit. If an economic development feels wrong, it is wrong, and don’t do it. If abortion feels wrong, it is wrong, and don’t do it. If capitalism feels wrong, it is wrong, and you should fight it. If this-or-that ethnic group or business group is holding back the nation, then we have a right to feel angry, deny help, and cut them out of mainstream life. Anger can lead to bad emotions and to working against the Spirit but that is a worthwhile risk.

Passion is not only obvious emotion such as love and not only obviously bad emotion such as bitterness. It is also the actions that go with love such as sex and with bitterness such as revenge.

Passion is not only stereotyped emotions but includes Intuition and Wit. Intuition is what we sense about a situation but might not be able to put into words. Intuition is our best guide. This idea of Romanticism was made famous in the Star Wars movies by the line “Trust your feelings”.

Wit is a combination of Passion, Reason, and Will with Passion leading the way (I cannot write about Will here). Here Passion definitely includes Intuition. Wit is “thinking out of the box” led by Intuition. Looking back after action, Wit can seem like Reason but it is more than that. Reason can understand what Wit did in retrospect but it could never have figured out beforehand to do that. It is Passion using Reason to achieve higher ends. It is not mere wittiness as in fun with words.

The best way to see the relations of Reason, Intuition, and Wit is through the acts of heroes. In Star Trek, Mr. Spock is Reason, Dr. McCoy is maudlin Passion and sometimes vague Intuition, and Captain Kirk is Intuition, Wit, and Will. More accurately, Captain Kirk is the right blend of all. In “The Odyssey”, Ulysses wins not by his considerable physical skills but by his Wit. Surprisingly often, super heroes win more by Wit than by their physical skills. Hercules won more by Wit than brawn. Superman often faces enemies who hold an advantage and still defeats them by Wit. James Bond is a walking bundle of Wit, and he

combines Wit with Passion through his relations to women and his love for country, freedom, and honor. Spiderman is always outmatched and he wins by Wit. All the toys of Batman are a material manifestation of Wit.

To me personally, modern times seem awash in emotional excess and superstition based on the needs for emotional gratification and Justification through Passion. This is not just emotion but bad dedicated irrationality. Even academics are mired in bad emotion. Below, I criticize the bad effects of irrationality on science. I like emotion. I like not being repressed, especially because my parents came from repressed Greek culture. I like Witty heroes and heroines. Still, Romanticism has gone way too far. People not only hold Reason below Passion and use Reason as a tool, they disparage Reason and reasonableness. They think any emotion is justified and any emotion is good for the emoting person and for everybody around. I have tried to see if other big eras in the West were like this, and I can't find any, although I am not a good historian.

### **Individual Projects.**

People like to be part of the projects of the Spirit but they can also have their own projects. Each of our projects is a combination of Reason and Passion with Passion guiding Reason to best results. Each of our projects has its own feel about it. The feel is the key to the project. Our projects identify who we are as unique individuals just as the projects of the Spirit identify its unique character at any one time.

People can have a few projects, one central project in their lifetimes, or many projects. Why people might have few or many projects, and the relation of their projects to projects of the Spirit, are good questions but not ones I can address here.

People want their projects to be like the projects of the Spirit. They want to feel as if their projects serve the projects of the Spirit even if they personally do not succeed in each project. People spiritualize and glamorize their projects. A success for an individual is not a success merely for an individual but for the Spirit as well. Anything that is not a success for the Spirit is not really a success for the individual even if it satisfies mundane wants such as family and career. People need more and seek more.

### **Life is an Adventure.**

The Spirit has an adventure in projecting itself out through the world. It might not be theologically correct to say the Spirit has fun, but it is close enough. Even if the activity of the Spirit never ends, but it always seems to be moving to a resolution, and, no matter how many and hard the hardships along the way, at key points it always turns out well. If there is a final end, that promises to turn out well too.

Likewise, our lives should be an adventure no matter how hard or frustrating at times. Our lives should turn out well, if not for us personally, then for the people we care about and for the good people of the world. The system is good even if not every particular life in it is happy. If things have not turned out well yet, then they are not over yet for everybody even if they are over for us. If it is not glamorous adventure then something is wrong and we are "out of tune". In Christian terms, life should be full of grace and charisma. Even if the world has fallen and some people go to hell, many other people can still receive grace and go to heaven. To have grace is to serve the Lord in whatever tasks he gives us. Adventure is

what ratifies our lives, tells us that we have the Grace of the Spirit and that we are Justified in the Spirit. If we feel the adventure, then we can feel confident we are on the right track.

### **The Road Goes Ever On and On.**

Even when particular projects fail, goodness, love, etc. cannot be stopped and must succeed in the end. The resistance encountered along the way makes the eventual progress forward all the more fun. It is more fun to overcome obstacles than simply to sail in.

Life is a series of projects in service to the Spirit. We might fail at any one project. When we enter a project, the project might not be ready to succeed yet, as with early workers in Civil Rights, Feminism, and the Right Wing Renaissance, so it might seem as if we fail. Our failures don't matter. Eventually good causes succeed, and we succeed because our heart is in the right place. What matters is that we keep working for goodness etc.

### **Emotion Justifies Projects.**

Commitment is a big part of emotion. They are inseparable. From now on, one term implies the other.

When you take the right attitude of emotional commitment to a project, you make that project worthwhile, and at least partially right, even if that project is not the central project now and even if it fails. Even if you switch projects later, that project was worthwhile while you were doing it. If you decide that saving the whales or saving American business is the right thing to do, and throw your emotional commitment into it, then it is the right thing to do now even if later you switch to something else. Emotional commitment is more important than thinking through to the best right thing to do.

### **Attitude about Attitude.**

If you have the right attitude, the right emotion, felt strong enough, then you have Faith, are Justified, and Saved. Attitude is the key. You don't have to have right beliefs as in formal Christianity or any formal religion. You don't need right beliefs as in a political program. You have to have the right attitude. If you have that, the Spirit is with you, and details don't matter. If you have the right attitude, then you have a personal relation with the Spirit. In Christian terms, if you have a personal relation with Jesus, you don't need anything else, and a personal relation with Jesus is self-validating.

If you have the right attitude, then you will succeed even if you are not prepared, don't have an education, have not done your homework, and don't really know what is going on.

It is a small step from having the right attitude to having "an attitude", that is, feeling bad ass and getting up in people's faces. Any bad ass attitude will do. If you have "an attitude" then you will succeed even if you are not prepared, don't have an education, etc. "An attitude" is faith; "an attitude" is the right kind of faith; "an attitude" is faith enough.

People have always known that changing your outlook on a situation can change the outcome of the situation even if everything else remains the same. People also have always known that there are better

and worse attitudes for particular situations. If somebody pushes you on the subway, then, if you get angry things will go one way, but if you say “that’s alright” things will go another. If somebody repeatedly pushes you, in the days to come, if you continue to say “that’s alright” things will go one way while if you say “knock it off” things will go another way. This is nothing new.

The following attitude about attitude has been around for at least 2300 years but the modern version is distinct and it is part of Romanticism: All that matters is your attitude. The situation doesn’t matter. We can change any situation any way we want by having the right attitude. We can get whatever we want by having the right attitude. Women can “have it all” if they have the right attitude. Men can be the boss if they have the right attitude. You can succeed with any member of the opposite sex if you have the right attitude. With every decade, every new soft drink, and every new daytime talk show, supposedly comes a new generation with a new attitude. You don’t have to change the world. You don’t have to understand the world. You don’t have to work on big problems or little ones. All you have to change is you, change your attitude. To make sure you change your attitude, and to make sure other people don’t impede you, you should hang around only with other people with the same attitude. Try to make all your friends have the same attitude, or at least give in to your attitude.

### **A Kind of Materialism Higher than the Angels.**

Sometime in early Christianity, and definitely in medieval Christianity, Christians developed the idea that a combination of a material body with a spirit (soul) is better than a spiritual body alone. Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christianity have always stressed the importance of sacraments and how the material and spiritual come together only in sacraments such as the Eucharist and Baptism. Humans are better than pure-spirit angels. That is why God loves us and why angels feel jealous of us. That is one reason Lucifer rejected God to set up his own order. Although long, Milton’s epic “Paradise Lost” is fun to read, and you can find out about the idea there. God is better than humans and angels even if, in our limited view, God is pure Spirit; it is better to think of God as beyond either spirit or matter.

Likewise the Spirit is beyond matter and beyond what we think of as spirit although the Spirit uses both. Here, the most important point is that the Spirit does use both, especially including matter. All projects of the Spirit are combinations of matter and spirit (ideas). The best way to think about it might be as art, which always has to use a medium such as sound or paint. We don’t want to look down on matter or to exalt spirit too much, especially as humans are a combination of both, and much of our good work gets done through the use of both. Our ecology and our economic system is, hopefully, the right use of both. In order to be like the Spirit and to work with the Spirit, we have to use both.

Reason is too much like pure spirit alone without the right mixture of matter – too much like angels who are jealous of God and humans. Passion is the right mixture of matter and Reason. Projects of the Spirit are always the right mixture of matter and Reason. Art, some science, and some technology show the right mixtures for humans. The weapons of good super heroes are the right mixture. We seek the right mixture in our lives with the right mixture of love and sex and with the right mixture of gadgets as a means to intrinsic satisfaction but not as an end in themselves. Usually Wit uses both. We seek the right mixture when we carry out the projects of the Spirit.

### **Rebels.**

Rebel bad boys and bad girls are representatives of Creative Chaos and the Spirit. Rebels show correct emotion and emotional commitment. They have one of the right attitudes. They take their right attitude to Life and to various projects in Life. It does not matter exactly what you do as a rebel, exactly what cause you push, as long as it is not wildly immoral. What matters is that you apply your rebel attitude to life. You can even be a “rebel without a cause” because the attitude itself ties you to the Spirit and to the next advance of the Spirit. What is good now is doomed to pass and therefore bad. It cannot pass without some rebellion to tear it down. Rebellion is good in itself.

If you apply rebellion to a cause, you don't have to worry much about the intrinsic validity, truth, or value. You don't have to think if rebellion is the best way to achieve the cause. You don't have to assess your personal time, energy, and talents to see if they are best used that way or are best used by acting as a rebel. The fact that you are a rebel Justifies whatever you apply your attitude to. Applying your rebel attitude to a cause Justifies you and the cause. Going around with a rebel chip on your shoulder is simply “leading with Spiritual emotions”; it is not irrational; it means that you follow the Spirit; it means that the Spirit is with you and your cause. Rebels can be the standard unkempt Lefty hero or can be inventors, innovators, legal innovators, business entrepreneurs, or political strategists.

Rebels excel in the right use of both matter and spirit; rebels excel in the right use of Wit; rebels excel in the right use of weapons. Rebels can combine rebellion with guarding the social order as the remnant. I suggest watching the movie “The Avengers”.

### **Other Roles Etc.**

Rebel is only one role among many that can serve as a vehicle for you to do the work of the Spirit and as cover for confused thinking. Almost any attitude can generate roles; and vice versa. Almost any dogma can generate attitudes and roles. Almost any role can find a dogma for justification. All roles, attitudes, and dogmas come with a set of approved and disapproved causes and activities. Use your imagination for examples of what you both like and dislike. Posers are bad role users.

### **Reason, Passion, and Cunning.**

Reason is subordinate to Passion and is the tool of Passion. When Reason and Passion get along well together, they are a powerful team. They serve goodness. They do good things. Only good Passions prevail and lead Reason, Passions such as kindness, generosity, a spirit of kinship, and the feeling of the Golden Rule. This is a Graceful union. A graceful union excludes bad Passions such as fear, revenge, guilt, and desire for power.

Much as we would like good Passions to dominate always, they don't. Then both Passion and Reason change. I don't describe bad Passions; I suggest a good dose of daytime and nighttime soap operas. Reason changes into Cunning. Cunning uses the same tools as Reason but uses them in a different way and uses them for the ends of bad Passion. It is the difference between good White magic and bad Black magic. Cunning is the bad versions of Intuition and Wit. I am totally inept at Cunning; I can never see it coming; I have no idea of what to do about it at the time; and I have no idea how to fix the bad effects of it after. So I don't try to describe it more.

Bad people have Bad Passion and Bad Wit. Evil villains in modern “epics” usually have a devious plan for conquering the world, and the “bad woman” on soap operas has a devious plan for ruining the name, spirit, and life of the heroine. The weapons of the villains are the material manifestation of their bad Wit as the weapons of the heroes are the material manifestation of their good Wit.

The Spirit can use indirect means and “fakes” in its projects. G.W.F. Hegel calls this “Cunning” but I think he has in mind a style of thinking more benign than what I have in mind. I am not sure if the Spirit can use Cunning in the sense that I have in mind. The Spirit can use what appears to be badness in the short run to gain greater good in the long run, and so the Spirit might use Cunning in the short run. I don’t know if the Spirit can use Cunning in the long run or overall.

### **More on the Correct Passion (Emotion).**

Imagine three conditions embodied by three kinds of people. All the people are with the Spirit, and have great powers as a result of being with the Spirit. All have a role to play in the adventure of the Spirit but not all are equally good and equally desirable.

First is the Jedi, who is rational, that is, Reasonable. He-she represents Reason and everything we can get done with Reason. The scientist or good lawyer is like this. The Jedi Council, or the league of peer-reviewed journals, are the community of Rational people.

Second is the right combination of Reason and Passion. These are the people who I described above. They follow their Passion and use Reason to get the job done in a good cause. This is like a good White magician, like most people see Merlin.

Third is a person who has fallen into bad Passion and uses Cunning. This is like a bad Black magician, like most people see Morgan Le Fay, Mordred, and the Devil. This is like a Sith, more like a Sith Master, and more especially like Darth Sidious (Emperor Palpatine), whose name reflects (means) “insidious” or “devious, cunning, and able to infiltrate without our knowing”.

Romantics all want to be like the second person, the good White magician. Nobody wants to be a stodgy rational Enlightenment Jedi. People think they can lead with their emotions, their emotions are always accurate and morally good, and that they use Reason totally without Cunning. If they use something like Cunning, it is only Reason in the service of a good cause.

In reality, when people try to be like person two they usually end up like person three, like a bad Sith apprentice. Romanticism is filled with bad Passion and Cunning. It is not full of the happy union of Reason and Passion. This is part of the general failure of Romanticism. I return to this failure below.

### **The Loneliness of the Long Time Spirit.**

Robert Frost: “And miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep”

The issue of this section impacts all major religions but I think it is most acute in Romanticism. It also shows how Romanticism “co-opts” ideas to make them its own. The lines from Robert Frost are true and beautiful in their own right but, when seen through the eyes of Romanticism, they are something else, and not what they should be. This issue here is equivalent to asking why God does what he does, why God does this thing rather than another, why God does anything rather than nothing at all, and what benefit God gets from doing some particular thing rather than nothing. It is another way of seeing the issue of individual versus community.

The Spirit embarks on many projects. The whole Spirit is never in any given project; only part of the Spirit can be in any given project. What is in any given project is not the Spirit but is something a bit different from the Spirit. What is in the project is of the Spirit but also not the Spirit and not of the Spirit. To use a little jargon, a project is of the Spirit somewhat but it is also “other” than the Spirit.

We know the Spirit only through its projects. Only some mystics, philosophers, and artists can know the Spirit in anything like its wholeness. The Spirit is never itself in any time that people can know. We know the Spirit not just by the small part of it that is revealed to us in particular projects but also by what it is other than the Spirit, especially also as revealed in projects. It is a curious problem.

In any given project, at the least, the Spirit forgets itself. At a little worse, in any given project, the Spirit is alienated from itself, cannot be its full self, cannot know itself, and does not know itself. The Spirit is alone and isolated. The isolation of the Spirit is reinforced by the qualitative distinction of each project. As long as the Spirit resides in any one project, it cannot know itself in other projects, and cannot know itself as a whole.

The Spirit has been out on projects for a long time, well before humans, and all the time humans have been around. That is a long time not to be one with yourself and not to know yourself fully. That is long enough so it might seem like the natural condition of the Spirit, at least to human beings who can know the Spirit only through the fractured incomplete projects of the Spirit. Even if the Spirit does not reckon time as humans do, and the Spirit will eventually reunite with itself, that time is still long.

Doesn't the Spirit feel lonely? Isn't being one whole integrated thing better than dividing up yourself, often into disreputable parts, and questing all the time? If the Spirit can never be whole, or can't be whole for a long time, and the Spirit is anything like a human person, the Spirit must feel bad. It feels bad to be at odds with yourself.

Why doesn't the Spirit bring itself into a community of itself? Sometimes the Spirit does, but I cannot go into that subject much here. We are more concerned with the isolation of the Spirit. Even when the Spirit does form a community, even that project is never the wholeness of the Spirit all at once, and even that project suffers from isolation.

As the Spirit is, so are its people. Individuals in Romanticism feel the call of Passions and projects but they also feel the loneliness of projects and of being stretched out in projects. They feel a part of all that the Spirit is, a part of the community of the Spirit; but they also feel separated from their own parts, their selves, and separated from the community. They are always in pieces, an individual, yet never a whole

individual; they are part of a community, but a community that is never completed. They can get some solace by feeling they are doing the work of the Spirit but they must also always feel pain.

When Romanticism becomes a system with capitalism and modern issues, these forces are accentuated to feed the isolation of modern life.

### **The Loneliness of the Fractured Qualitatively Distinct Spirit and Its People.**

The Spirit goes out on many distinct projects. If the projects were pretty much the same thing dressed up in different clothes, there would be no point. The projects have to be qualitatively distinct. Nobody except maybe the Spirit can directly fully compare one project to another. Each project is its own measure, its own standard. Each project has its own feel, Passion, Reason, art, morality, etc. No project can be seen or evaluated in terms of another project. The distinctly different projects add variety and fun to the world. They make it fun to go out into the world and to come back from a project to the Spirit self. Without the qualitatively distinction, the world would not be a playground.

As individual people, we are like particular projects of the Spirit. We are distinct, qualitatively different, and unique. We know what we like and dislike. We have our own standards, including morality, and we don't like other people to impose theirs on us. We know of general principles, and might adopt some, but we don't have to adopt all and we don't have to let them rule all aspects of our lives. This individuality makes our lives fun, interesting, and worthwhile. It makes life more interesting when distinct people can reach across the boundaries of their distinctions to really connect, often seeing similarities to help us get along but never surrendering our distinctive uniqueness.

Uniqueness sounds great when you get your own way but uniqueness has drawbacks. "Solipsism" is the technical term for absolute uniqueness, usually bad, in which no individual gets across to another. Totally unique individuals have not enough in common around which to relate. They are alone. They are lonely. They can't communicate or share. They are sad demons trapped in isolation hell, not happy agents of the Spirit. Even when they are in the same activity supposedly together, such as sex, they cannot know how the other person feels, if the other person really feels good, or is just "faking it". They don't share interests; their interests overlap. When interests stop overlapping, people part. People end up sitting alone in their apartments or walking down the street "plugged in" to their own mix oblivious. Even when people join a cause, they do it not for the sake of the cause but to feel good themselves.

Critics of modern life blame this situation on lack of religion or on capitalism depending on their ideology. Critics seem unable to talk to each other any better than the people they criticize.

Luckily, evolved human nature helps us somewhat. People are different just like faces are different but they share a lot in common just like faces do. People can stand on what they have in common as people or as members of the same culture-society and work their way toward how they are unique. In that case, how they are unique can unite them rather than separate them. We evolved to be self-interested but not necessarily selfish. We evolved to be social. People like groups. We expect a certain amount and kind of sociability in ourselves and others and we can build on that. Evolved human nature cannot bridge all gaps. People are still lonely. But it can provide a base.

How isolated people are depends on all the usual factors and might tend to more in some conditions than others. Sometimes close group life is not satisfying but oppressive. When my wife and I lived in the American Midwest with people who shared our interests and backgrounds, and could relate to us outside of defined groups, we were not lonely. In the South, where nobody shares our interests and everybody relates through church, family, race, or hunting, we are lonely despite our best efforts. Peasants in old-style villages often were packed together and everybody knew everyone else's business but people still felt lonely and isolated. Some people are happy with Internet friends.

Capitalism, Romanticism, most modern technology, modern populist democracy, modern legal ideas and the modern legal system, bureaucracy, and Protestant ideas about the individual and God, all reinforce individual isolation. I don't know which is the strongest. Romanticism is a powerful enabler of glamorized isolation. When the other forces help push people into isolation, Romanticism then can lock people in and push them down a deep well. That is what happened in the West after about 1780.

### **Just Me and the Spirit Alone Together.**

This section is optional. Romanticism, in the 1900s in particular, is famous for isolated tormented souls spending years alone with God, Art, Philosophy, Science, etc. The first great Romantic musician, Ludwig van Beethoven, set the pattern. Rock-and-roll artists have to spend time brooding alone or they are not real. Rap (hip hop) musicians are lonely tortured souls even in the midst of their "posse". An interesting version is the Protestant alone with Jesus. All you need is Jesus. If you have him, nothing else matters. If you have Jesus, the Church and "all that" are not important. If you don't have Jesus, you have nothing. Some people always have had this personality. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox mystics, monks, and saints spent time alone with Jesus, God, or demons. Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness alone with his alter ego the Father – until Satan came along to spoil it. But this attitude did not become a wide cultural type until the 1600s, about the time the Protestant Ethic was laying the base for capitalism and Romanticism. This stance did not become a common type, almost necessary among intellectuals and artists, until Romanticism. This stance makes more sense from a Romantic view than from a traditional Christian view in which relations with God, Holy Spirit, Jesus, Church, community of Christians, and even non-Christians, play a role in life. In Romanticism, it makes sense to be a solitary soldier for the isolated Spirit, seeking a project of the Spirit, or the project of the Spirit, and devoting yourself as a project to the project of the Spirit. If you have that, you have it all. If you don't, you have nothing. If you have that, then you are Justified before the Spirit and before all humans, so your lonely brooding makes sense. Lonely brooding is a sign that you do have that, so are Justified before the Spirit, and Justified before all people. Lonely brooding with the Spirit, Jesus, or an equivalent, makes sense, and it attracts the appropriate gender. The lonely brooder alone with Spirit-Jesus is a reason why often I see people who publically hold to a traditional religion as Romantic and why I see supposedly non-religious people just as religious as most Christians.

### **Moral Relativity and Moral Absolutism.**

Each project is a thing in itself. It has its own goals, its own rules, its own way of proceeding, and its own kinds of people. It also has its own morality. The right-and-wrong of one project cannot be used to judge the right or wrong of any other project. Each project offers its own morality by which to judge itself. The morality for urban hipster pseudo-nouveau-Bohemians can't be used to judge the morality of traditional

Christians, and vice versa. This attitude is clearly one small step away from moral relativity, easily takes the step, is easily used to justify moral relativity, and often is. I don't go through the details.

Morality is about relations and strongly implies groups. Projects are about the Spirit in the world, often changing the whole world, so projects most often are group efforts. So it might seem the moral relativity of Romanticism puts the group ahead of the individual. One group cannot impose its morality on another group but the group can impose its morality on the individual. This is usually what happens.

But, as in the section above, there is also the relation between the Spirit and the isolated individual. The Spirit has used prophets, lawmakers, politicians, scientists, and artists to change the world. As if these people were a species (group) unto themselves, they cannot be judged by the standards of other people and groups. So the moral relativity of Romanticism can also be used to support moral subjectivism and moral relativity of individuals. It can reinforce individual isolation. This tension persists through all of group and individual relations in Romanticism. I can't say more about it here than to point it out.

It might seem Romanticism is morally relative on the level of both groups and individuals but that is not so. When a project is clearly a project of the Spirit and the project needs individuals, the group has the right to dominate individuals morally. The morality of the group appears as absolute morality to the single individual. This is how individuals feel when they are caught in a strong church or a cult.

In the same way, from the point of the view of a particular group, not all groups are equal, and this group, our group, is best. Our morality is best. It is the only real true morality. We have the right to impose our morality on other groups. Not all projects are equal to the Spirit. At any given time, usually only one, or a very few, project is the vanguard of the Spirit leading the world. That is what the world will become. If our group represents the Spirit in its lead project, then our group has the duty to impose its morality on the whole world, all the groups in it, and all the people in all the groups.

The tension between relativism and absolutism also runs through Romanticism. It might seem Romanticism should settle into a comfortable attitude of "live and let live" along with some principles by which to relate to everybody, it does not. It bounces between subjectivism and objectivism, between relativism and absolutism. It reinforces strong emotions on all sides. It reinforces excuses and enabling on all sides.

### **Love is All We Need.**

Each project is a thing in itself with no necessary connection to any other project. Each individual is a thing in itself with no necessary connection to any other individual except through their roles in a shared project that subsumes them both. The Spirit travels a long way before going home. The Spirit is never quite fully at home in this world. We can be alone together with the Spirit and should be.

All this adds up to a lot of isolation, seemingly unbridgeable. Using logic, reason, or any kind of traditional faith, the isolation is unbridgeable. But it is not entirely unbridgeable. Each person, no matter whether in the current main project of the Spirit, and no matter how seemingly at odds with the Spirit, still is in the Spirit and of the Spirit. Recall that morality cannot be reduced to logic; it is a kind of Passion. The Spirit feels Passion when pouring itself into projects. Each project has its own Passions. Passion is the new

Faith. We can bridge the gap between individuals, and even across projects, with Passion. People differ on which particular Passion they think is most effective in bridging the unbridgeable gaps but most people in modern Europe and America seem to have settled on Love as the dominant Passion that can bridge all gaps. This idea of Love rises, falls, and rises again on parts of the world outside Europe and America as pop culture spreads the idea. I don't go into the details of how Love does the trick, and I don't offer much criticism here because I assume most criticism is fairly evident.

I have nothing against Love and I wish we had more of it. I wish we could live up to Jesus' teaching to love even our enemies, and I wish we could live up to the compassion taught in Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. I wish we could live up to the spontaneous affection taught by Taoism. I regret that Love does not do the job all by itself.

Here I only point out the tension between Love, different moralities, and different projects. What if Love does not fit into a project, or fits in only as a relation between members and not as a relation between individuals of different projects? What if we can Love the people in our group but should hate the people in other groups as part of the Spirit-given project of our group? Love can serve as a bridge only when it is in accord with the rules of the project. It cannot bridge when it contradicts the rules of the project. And, so, in the end, love is not any addition to the project and it cannot serve as a universal bridge. Yet, if this is true, we need Love all the more. And so on. Whether other systems offer a solution to this dilemma, I do not guess here; but Romanticism does not. So Love becomes part of the bouncing around between subjectivism and objectivism, relativism and absolutism. That is not how I see Love.

I avoid almost all issues of relations between Romantic Passion love and romantic love.

For Love to serve as a universal bridge, it must be above all mere Reason. Even Christians tend to see Love this way. If Love has no Reason, then it could seem capricious to mere humans. We don't want the Love of the Spirit (God) to be capricious, and we don't want the deep compassionate Love that we could extend even to our enemies to be capricious. This raises a problem. To get at the problem, I work with the idea of romantic love. Assume romantic love reflects Romantic Love; for ease, I call "romantic love" "affectionate love". At least Americans do take affectionate love to be capricious in that we are free to fall in love with anyone we want, and love seems to come on us out of nowhere; and now other parts of the world seem to do the same as Western pop culture expands.

Affectionate love should be entirely capricious in that anybody could fall in love with anybody else. But that is not what happens. When one person falls in love with another person, the other person should fall in love with the first one too; otherwise we get awful awkward scenes when the "L bomb" drops. There should be barriers of class, race, or creed to affectionate love, but, in fact, people fall in love within their class, race, and creed. There should be no barriers of number, so that one man could fall in love with six women or one woman with six men; but we don't want that. There should be no barriers of gender but people also fall in love in a pattern of man-and-woman. We are willing to bend the edges a bit to keep the dogma of affectionate love: we now accept homosexual love. But bending the edges brings the problem back. As right wingers say: if we allow that two men can fall in love the way that a man and woman can, then why not a woman and a dog or a man and a cow? If we limit affectionate love to a man and woman, then why should men and women fall in love at all? If we limit love partly, why can we restrict it to those two categories? Why not do away with love entirely? If we don't want to do away with love entirely, then

how can we restrict it to something between the categories “man” and “woman” and limit it to one man and one woman? Why does the Spirit Love everybody, and, if the Spirit does, why can't we see it? Why does the Spirit seem to Love some people more? Why do some people Love some other people more and Love some other people less?

Modern Darwinism certainly gives some good reasonable answers to these questions but Romanticism, and traditional religions too, don't want to go that way. Within Romanticism, there are no good answers. Love should cross boundaries but can't cross all boundaries. If Love can't cross all boundaries, then Love is bound by logic, and then it isn't Love. This tension in Love mixes in with tensions in morality and persons too. I don't think there are any good answers within traditional religion either, and this vacancy supports Romanticism.

### **Busy Bodies.**

On this world, the Spirit is never quite whole. No project entirely captures the Spirit but each project tries in its way. While any particular task might end, the succession of tasks never ends until maybe the grand end. We want to do right by doing the work of the Spirit, but know we will never quite be one with yourself and the Spirit. This all lead us to feel restless. Restlessness pushes us into working for causes, leads us to jump into trends, and leads to what I call “flitting”. It adds to the tendency of Romantics to be busy bodies and busybodies.

If you are not involved in this project, you should be involved in that project. Always be involved. Always be emotional. Always be committed. Always be emotionally committed. Have faith. Stay busy. Stay busy working on issues with people, society, religion, politics, nature, or all of them together. Always be working on a cause. If you are busy working this way, you are one with the Spirit. If you are not busy working this way, then you are not one with the Spirit. People flit from activity to activity, like “channel surfing” with the remote control on TV. The flitting helps people not feel isolation and not feel the fact that most activities are empty; but it never quite makes the feeling go away entirely.

When I lived with peasants, I saw that they also keep themselves busy, but in a different way, and the difference is telling. Peasants kept busy weaving roof thatch, sewing, making little things to sell, making food items to sell, tending animals, etc. These were not activities in the Romantic sense. They were tasks that people could to make some money or at least to help along the family farm. Even in the United States, I saw the same. People from Central America moved in below my wife and I in our apartment complex. Somehow they got paid for weaving wires and for other tasks for the construction industry, so they never just sat idly but always did one of those tasks.

Modern people are not busy in the same way. They do not do tasks for economic gain though they think of activities as “for the family” or “intrinsically worthwhile” in many ways. People go from task to task in the same way that people “channel surf” on TV. You have to be watching something all the time, and you seek the activity that is most “spiritually” satisfying.

Western people, and modern people, tend not to do tasks, they attack activities. They are furious in what they do. I can't blame this attitude entirely on Romanticism but it seems to intensify under Romanticism. I once saw a good illustration on TV. A Native American and a White man were chopping down trees,

each working on his own tree. The White man chopped furiously and did chop his trees in a little less time than the Native American but he also wore out quickly and had to take many breaks. At the end of the day, he was useless. The Native American swung rhythmically, always finished his task, and never got so tired that he had to stop. At the end of the day, he could sleep well. The Native American pointed out this difference to the White man but the White man could not change his habits. People even pursue leisure with the same fury so the leisure hardly helps.

Besides being busy, Romantics tend to be busybodies, always to have a scheme, and be intrusive, Left or Right. People who act this way are Romantics whether they think of themselves as Conservatives, Liberals, Gay Activists, Anti-abortionists, Christians, or Muslims. Romanticism brings out the part of our personalities that is like this even when we know better.

### **Glamorize to Romanticize.**

I cannot explain here what glamour is. It is not just “high fashion”, which, ironically, is one of the lowest forms of glamour. Marlon Brando on a motorcycle is glamorous, even in a silly outfit, and even though his bike was not a Harley. While fad foods are still a fad, they are glamorous. Sometimes duck hunting is glamorous; sometimes not.

I can give a quick sense of some glamour with a little jargon. We glamorize by putting things a distance; we have to use the right distance; we can't make them too far or they would be so strange that we can't relate; we can't make them close or we wouldn't be awed and interested. “Distance” is reckoned in terms of “like us” rather than meters or minutes. We glamorize by “making other” in the right ways. Americans like clothes from Europe; the most glamorous are from France or Italy. Americans don't wear clothes from New Guinea or Toronto. It helps if the thing glamorized shows intrinsic power as well, such as kung fu, shows intrinsic wealth such as a Ferrari, or shows intrinsic connection to spirituality such as E.T. We can more easily glamorize some animals such as a Phoenix than other animals such as dung beetles. A skilled artist can make almost anything the right distance with the right attributes, and glamorous, such as Fargo, North Dakota.

All stances glamorize projects, causes, groups, and types of people according to what the stance values and to what sustains the stance. Christianity glamorizes priests, and Buddhism glamorizes monks, even beyond their considerable intrinsic value. Christianity glamorizes the Church.

I think glamorizing is more important in Romanticism than in most other stances. In Romanticism, we can never completely know the Spirit or its projects, but we are part of the Spirit, and we want to participate in its projects. The Spirit and its projects are “out there”, somewhat connected to us, not fully accessible by us, yet highly desirable, shiny, alluring, powerful, and often wealthy. The projects and things of the Spirit are glamorous because they are “other”, partly like us but different from us, and so likely better than us. If we can be part of a project, we are important. If we can be glamorous and “other”, then we are likely part of a project and therefore important.

Glamour is the sanctity of Romanticism. People want to feel glamorous so they can feel in touch with the Spirit and can feel sacred. Glamour is the new sanctity. To glamorize is to spiritualize. Something made spiritual is also made glamorous, and most things made glamorous are also made spiritual. I do not here

distinguish between true spirituality as defined by any traditional religion and the glamour of Romanticism that they would call false spirituality and false sanctity. Even the supposedly spiritual acts of traditional religion would not really be spiritual if they were done more in the spirit of Romanticism.

So we look for what is desired by other people, shiny, alluring, powerful, and wealthy. We assume that thing is of the Spirit. We try to “hook up” with that thing so we can be important too. If we hook up with something that is glamorous, then we have succeed spiritually, not just materially. If we succeed, then we are glamorous too.

People take advantage of glamour. If one person wants to make something appealing to other people, the first person makes that thing glamorous by making it seem to be linked to the Spirit and-or making it alluring, shiny, appear to be desired, etc. This is a key to advertising. Whether a thing is actually tied to the Spirit doesn't matter as long as the purveyor can make people think it is. I don't go into how “ad men” and other purveyors do this.

Glamour is an important part of trying to be unique and connected at the same time, and it suffers from the same contradictions. This conundrum is obvious in the car and beauty industries where every car really is just a car and all women are women first but car makers and women go to great lengths to try to make themselves unique.

Some glamour in Romanticism is fairly persistent, as, for example, the glamour of artists, rebels, playboys and playgirls, underbelly of society, and some criminals. Safe middle class people glamorize non-White lower-class semi-dangerous marginalized people, including some criminals. That is one reason why we have so many movies and TV shows about marginal people who are really human after all. Even acts that do not seem very glamorous to an outsider seem glamorous to an insider such as trudging through a slimy bog to save a toad or trudging the mean streets outside clinics to save unborn babies.

The pursuit of glamour likely is the largest task in Romanticism, taking up the most time and energy. It is never done. It is never completely achieved. There is always more glamour to be harvested, and there is always some other activity that is more glamorous than the one right now.

### **More on Marginal, Glamorous, Dogma, and “of the Spirit”.**

Marginal people are more like Creative Chaos and thus more likely to be the tools of the Spirit and more likely to be close to the Spirit. They are more real. Artists are creative and alive, and thus close to the Spirit in those ways, and closer to Creative Chaos and so closer to the Spirit in that way too. Artists are closer to the Spirit in at least three ways. Romantics like to think of themselves as creative and alive like artists, and they like to emulate artists, or to think of themselves as artists.

Romantics tend to get more of their ideas about what to do, what causes to join, from popular media and art than from traditional sources such as the Church. Even when Romantics act in causes sanctioned by some church, such as anti-abortion, they still likely get most of their cues from popular media such as TV shows on religion. Left wing Romantics get much of their ideas from rock, hip-hop, and movies.

The Romantic view of Life and Art as glamorous adventure, with artist rebels leading the way and always correct, is not true. It never works out. Even when Romantics win, as in the French Revolution, it never works out. It can work out partially but it never works out with as much satisfaction as Romantics hoped, and it always causes more problems. If anti-abortion activists ever get their way and ban abortions in the United States, it will not work out, and we will be worse off. Rock-and-roll might have built this country but this country could never run according to rock-and-roll. Why this happens, I do not explain here. It is important to see that it does happen, and to see the results.

Romanticism glamorizes ideas and so turns them into dogmas; Romanticism glamorizes its dogmas. A dogma can't be a dogma unless it is glamorous; whatever idea is glamorous either is a dogma or part of a dogma. In Romanticism, people not only have an idea of a project, they heavily glamorize it. In one of its glamorous forms, the next project of the Spirit is "the next big thing" in music, fashion, TV, or fad foods. In Romanticism, Creativity is not just an idea and an attribute of the Spirit, it is heavily glamorous as one of the most sacred things that people can do and it leads to artists as one of the most powerful sacred kinds of people. Intoxication is the same because it is non-rational super-rational and so leads us closer to the Spirit. Romantic glamour is part of the power of dogmas of both liberals and conservatives. That is a big way in which their ideas become dogmas. The idea of Tradition is sensible by itself but that is not enough for conservatives who turn it into sacred dogma. The sensible idea of political freedom becomes dogma in different ways for both sides, and they invest it heavily with the glamour of soldiers dying and of Civil Rights marches. The idea of fairness for the genders in the workplace is sensible but the idea of absolute sameness of the genders is a glamorous misleading dogma. Because I dislike dogmas of all kinds from any source, I return to the subject later in the chapter.

### **Inversions and Doubling Down.**

Ideally, Romantics should define themselves through the positive contributions they make by being in the vanguard of the Spirit and doing the work of the Spirit in creating a new order. Sometimes this is the case as when Gay people brought a positive new image of "gay-ness". Often, Romantics define themselves by what they oppose, especially against other groups. They present their cause positively but the real fervor underneath comes from opposing. They have a sense of opposition as Creative Chaos but really below it is just anger and bitterness. Two examples from our times are "Pro Life" and "Pro Choice". The "just say 'NO'" of Republican Congresses is a clear example. People who are "pro family" rarely have thought out what forms a family might take in the modern world but really are against gays, single mothers, and the family style of ethnic groups they dislike. The stereotype of feminists as frustrated "man haters" was cruel but had more than a grain of truth.

Thwarted Romantics do not become rational. They "double down". They get stubborn. They attack their enemies rather than fight for goodness. Thus we get the "culture wars".

The Romantic attitude is crusader, rebel, zealot, busy body, self-styled saint, self-styled expert, guardian of a "cause territory" such as saving the US from do-gooders, constant chip on the shoulder, feeling that nobody "gets it", feeling everybody is against you and your group, and minor cosmic visionary.

“The problems that I care about are the relevant ones even if you show me other issues that are deeper and that cause the problems I care about. The problems that I care about are the ones that working on will bring my group most, and that is what really matters.”

### **Groups with Special Appeal.**

People want to be close to the Spirit so they want to be close to groups that are close to the Spirit. In traditional religion, they want to be close to priests; in most systems, they want to be close to people who are wealthy, powerful, successful, and glamorous. In Romanticism, they want to be close to those people too but some groups have particular appeal. People want to be close to rebels, the Remnant, artists, entrepreneurs, and marginal people such as some criminals, some losers, and the underbelly of society. These groups are most likely to be seen in glamorous terms although not all Romantics would understand that they see these in glamorous terms; Americans really do see losers in glamorous terms but don't like to admit they see losers that way even when they admit they feel sympathy toward losers and admire tough guy losers or big-hearted losers.

### **Supporting Special Groups.**

I can understand some sympathy toward downtrodden, marginal, excluded, and unlucky people such as people with cancer or people who get stuck unemployed and underemployed in capitalism. In the West, before Romanticism, small groups of Christians would minister to the downtrodden but, despite the clear teachings of Jesus, people in general were not much sympathetic to the downtrodden, and rich people were scornful. The character of “Scrooge” is no aberration. With Romanticism, people are sympathetic and are inclined to give marginal groups power, money, and state support. People seem to feel guiltier about the relative plight of others and more inclined to help not only on a case-by-case basis but through permanent institutions such as welfare, Social Security, the Farm Bill, and tax breaks for business firms. Americans are often surprised to learn that Social Security was originally the idea of the powerful German Chancellor Bismarck in the 1870s, one of the peaks of German Romanticism.

One reason that people are more inclined to support the downtrodden is that some downtrodden have a close link to the Spirit, as, for example, we attribute Creative Chaos to the poor and to ethnic groups that differ from the dominant ethnic group. A second related reason is that taking care of the children of the Spirit makes people feel close to the Spirit and feel good. It is a cause, a project. Another reason is that distrust of traditional institutions is an intrinsic part of how Romanticism works; see below. People did not trust the old ways of taking care of the downtrodden, such as church charity or poor houses, so people wanted to take care of the children of the Spirit in newer better ways. So people devised new institutions to take care of the poor and to make themselves feel good.

Likely the biggest reason why people support marginalized groups through institutions has little to do directly with Romanticism. Except for a few Christians, comfortable people don't want to deal directly with marginal people if the marginal people are not a glamorized group. Even then, people don't want to deal directly with real marginalized people, such as real criminals, but with glamorized versions of them such as small time drug dealers. Instead, people set up institutions to deal with the symptoms of marginal people. Rather than deal with the problems of capitalism that generate unemployment, we can set up unemployment insurance. Rather than deal with the fact that farms should be turned into business firms

just like every other mom-and-pop operation, we set up farm welfare through the farm bill. I can tie this attitude into Romanticism but it is better just to let it lie openly as it is.

Getting back on track: Problems arise when we deal with marginalized people through new institutions because we don't trust old institutions. New institutions become old institutions quickly enough, and then we don't trust the solution that we made ourselves. This dilemma is now true of almost all the institutions we created to deal with marginal people. The old institutions didn't work for the good reason that almost no institutions can deal with problems such as poverty. The new institutions can't ultimately deal either. The response depends on which side of the fence you sit and whether you like the group and institution. If you like the people who receive help, then you push for more institution and more money, as President Obama suggested that community college be free for everybody, and as Republicans push for tax breaks for oil producers. Otherwise, you hate it, as many people hate welfare and some people hate "defense" spending. People "double down" as explained above. Any way you see it, you can think of yourself as on the side of the Spirit.

### **Using Romanticism.**

In any stance, once people have figured it out, and see that people in general are susceptible to some ideas of the stance, these clever people use the stance to manipulate other people. Glamour shows how this tactic can work in Romanticism. People manipulate Romanticism by taking on the airs of a group that can ask for special privileges such as artists, rebels, racial minorities, business people, entrepreneurs, farmers, small business owners, women, the underbelly of society, and victims of overseas disaster. I am amazed at how susceptible people in general are to claims. People in general automatically give groups special status and privileges so as to feel they participate in the Spirit themselves. Clever people take on the airs of a marginalized group so they can get respect, wealth, and sex from other people. The longest running standard dodge has been the rock-and-roll rebel artiste but that game is mostly fun and does little harm other than a few misplaced lives. More harmful, since the rise of Reagan-ism, has been the ability of business people to present themselves as besieged marginalized victims in dire need of state help even while they attack a big state and attack others for getting help. I am shocked that business people can portray entrepreneurs as marginalized beleaguered victims trying to act as agents of Creative Chaos and the Spirit, as "job creators". I am amazed that people in general buy this crap along with buying all the claims of Blacks, Hispanics, and White thugs. I am amazed the people like the Tea Party can rail against the benefits that other people get while overlooking all the benefits received by the middle class, especially in Republican states. Manipulating Romanticism for the gain of self and group is a serious danger to democracy. We will see more at the end of the chapter.

### **Culmination.**

If we believe German Romantic philosophers such as Hegel and pop artists such as Bob Dylan, nobody really knew the Spirit well before they came along. On purpose, the Spirit didn't even really know itself. All projects of the Spirit before modern times were done without the Spirit really being aware what it was doing, or that it was doing, including even such grand projects as Buddhism and Classical Greece. Only now is the Spirit aware that it has been doing it all along. Romanticism is the Spirit aware of itself at last. In words that I learned from California New Agers, Romanticism is nature aware of itself just as people (sentient beings) are nature's way of being aware of itself. Nobody talked about the Spirit unfolding itself

until recently; but now we do. It is not clear why the Spirit chose to reveal itself to itself through us at this time, but it has, and we have to assess the results.

The self-awareness of the Spirit is like other great culminations. It is like the second coming of Jesus the Christ, from which Romantics likely borrowed the idea. It is like end times. It is like the bodhisattva who finally sees how the world works and chooses to save all sentient beings. It is like a great Buddha or like great avatar such as Krishna who do the same. It is like political utopias such as Communist heaven, Fascist heaven, free market heaven, or PC heaven.

Most of this belief would be charming except it has bad effects on attitude. It intensifies attitude. If this is the time of the Spirit, if this is the last project of the Spirit, then we had better be on board. We had better be doing the work of the Spirit. We had better be children of the Spirit. If we are not actively working in one of the important projects of the Spirit, then we are "left behind". To paraphrase Bob Dylan, "He not busy being born is busy dying". Whatever good comes at the revealing of the Spirit will not be good for us. This belief intensifies seeking for projects and makes even stronger the already strong commitment to some projects. It leads Romantics to oppose people on the other side harshly and even denigrate people who are not with them.

The Romantic attitude from culmination is much like the attitude of other end-of-this-world-start-of-the-next-world crazies although most Romantics do not see it consciously in those terms. I think that kind of feeling has been more common in the West since the Renaissance, and more common in the last three hundred years with the rise of Romanticism. I am not sure which caused which. I am sure they support each other even when the people in one branch disdain the people in another branch.

If it makes you feel better, academics are not immune. It is unlikely any one paradigm can explain the whole human experience, not even my favorite evolution. Academics who study people usually are Romantics like other people. They see their work as part of the work of the Spirit although they don't usually say so and don't like to think of themselves as like other religious people. Academics seize on fads such as structuralism, post-structuralism, and modernism as if the fads were dewdrops from the brows of the Spirit, and work with as much zeal on their project in these final days of the Spirit as any religious fanatic preparing for Jesus, the victory of Islam, the coming of Krishna, or the coming of the Jewish Messiah.

### **Some Synthesis; Mostly Bad News; Some Good News.**

The individual in Romanticism can be isolated, part of a group as part of a project, or have a mystical feeling of union with the Spirit. Few people choose mystical union although modern times have more than their share of lost seekers. Most people want to be in a group that is like a community and want to feel that their community is part of a project of the Spirit. In social science jargon, people seek a church.

Capitalism does not have to drive people toward isolation but it has that tendency more than to lead people to a healthy community (unless people belong to a healthy business firm; when I wrote this, Apple and Google were used as examples). The isolation of capitalism can be overcome by the group-and-project tendency of Romanticism as when people get off work to work on a common cause such as Pro-Life, Pro-Choice, or Save Trees. Isolation can be overcome when people join a common-interest group

such as Tai Chi Chuan or when they join a religious church. Far too often, the isolation inherent and the isolation inherent in Romanticism combine to make people feel really alone – alone to the point of wacky. Which tendency wins out depends on all kinds of factors that I leave to sociologists and anthropologists.

Capitalism does not have to drive people to moral subjectivism at the individual level or group level but that tendency is stronger in capitalism than any tendency to drive people to seek the one true objective morality. Romanticism also has a drive to subjective morality because each project is its own world and own standard, including morality. The drives to moral subjectivity can combine with the drives toward isolation at the individual or group level. When the two drives toward moral subjectivity combine, then we see many isolated individuals each his-her own little moral demon. These people suffer. More often, we see small bands of individuals united in small groups, each group having its own morality. We get cults, 30,000 Protestant denominations, fundamentalists, terrorists, zealots, and I-don't-know-how-many political causes. I doubt this could happen without the combination of Capitalism and Romanticism, plus a few other changes such as mobile fractured families that I can't go into here. But it does happen.

The good news is when the ability to share interests in capitalism combines with the ability to join projects in Romanticism, and with a good sense of morality descended from the morality that is common to all the great religions, to give us useful healthy groups and useful healthy people. These are the dedicated but not crazy groups that do community service or provide beneficial activities.

One very big task of critics of modern life, of citizens, religious leaders, and politicians, is to swing the balance from isolated moral subjectivity of individuals and small groups to modest communal useful groups without killing our sense of democratic individualism. To do this, our leaders have to see big deep problems, have to understand why we avoid dealing with them, have to see how to deal with them, and have to explain it all clearly to us. I see little evidence this is happening.

### **Romanticism and Some Big Bad Groups.**

To overcome the potential for feeling isolated and morally adrift, people join groups. The trend is strong in times of trouble with the economy, politics, and the family. Moral subjectivity as a political theory does not alone cause this tendency. The tendency comes out of economic and social conditions far more than out of philosophy, theology, or social science. When people join good groups, and the groups can help with the problems (or at least the symptoms), then there is little problem.

Sometimes people join good groups in bad times and help the times get better. These groups tend to have good ideologies. Examples include the community action wing of the Black Panthers, many church groups, Red Cross, Red Crescent, Doctors without Borders, and people within the major political parties who want to really understand modern problems and do something about them.

Problems come when people join groups that have a bad morality or bad ideology. Critics say that the bad ideology-morality turns the people in the group bad and turns the group bad but I think this view is much too simple. More often, people join groups with a bad morality because they feel bad and think they will feel better in the group. That is why people join gangs. The bad dogma can further shape people after they join but it does not alone make them bad. People are not bad in modern times because

of philosophical ideas about the supremacy of the individual and moral subjectivism but people gravitate toward groups that use those ideas to justify bad acts.

A little bad group is a cult or a gang. I don't dwell on them anymore. Sometimes they grow up to be big bad groups.

The real problem comes when people join big bad groups, especially when Romanticism ratifies a big bad group. Almost any big bad group can find ratification by interpreting Romanticism. Romanticism is well suited to supporting big bad groups. I don't know if it is better suited than other ideologies such as pro-capitalism, Christianity, or Islam; but I think so; I don't argue the question now. Romanticism supports such groups by allowing them to believe they are rebels or the Remnant. They are the force of the Spirit even if they do a few bad things. They are the spearhead of the Spirit. They do not need a relation to any major religion for or against; they can ignore standard religion if they want; or they can accept any endorsement that suits their needs.

For reasons that I don't go into here, often big bad groups have a racist base. Examples include Black and White gangs, and Black and White Supremacists.

Sometimes they combine race and religion. The religion does not have to be a standard religion or even a religion that people recognize as a religion. The most famous example of modern times is Nazism. The Nazis actually did use a religion as a base, a religion that took features from Spiritualism and from other religions such as Celtic mythology, Norse mythology, and Egyptian religion. The "Indiana Jones" movies make fun of this aspect of Nazism. Nazism was a quintessential Romantic movement gone bad. Against modern critics, it was not caused primarily by moral subjectivism or other bad ideologies although it used those ideologies-emotions to recruit and hold members.

The first two big bad Romantic groups-and-movements were the French Revolution and the sweep of Napoleon Bonaparte across Europe. I mention those later in this chapter.

The third big Romantic group-movement was Communism. I cannot go into the differences among the groups in Communism to show which were more or less Romantic. Marx was a student of Hegel, and Hegel was a founder of Romanticism. Although Marx tried to get away from Hegel, he could not get away from prevailing Romanticism. People do not think of Communism as a religion but it is. Communists like to play fast-and-loose with moral relativity but, in fact, they have their own morality that comes from life in a collectivity and from grasping power. Communists use the progress of the human race as their project; they conceive of this project in terms that can only make sense if we think of it as the biggest project of the World Spirit in our times. Marxists are the rebels, Remnant, and chosen people serving as the tools of the Spirit to create the form of the Spirit for our times.

In fairness, both the major political parties in the United States, and their offshoots such as the Tea Party, and allied groups such as feminists, think in much the same terms but are less nasty. Major churches, especially when they actively proselytize, also think in the same terms. This is where we can see the combination of Romanticism with traditional religion. Watch the Protestant and Roman Catholic TV channels. If you can get it, listen to a Muslim broadcast.

To channel people into good groups and away from bad groups, we have to have a good grasp on the conditions that make people seek groups, seek good groups, seek bad groups, on good morality, and on bad morality. We have to see deep problems and be willing to address them in ways that people think will lead to good results. Again, I don't think we have done this and I don't think we will soon. I do not push the idea that we all must inevitably fall into bad groups; I just think it will be all the harder to form and find good groups.

#### **PART 5: The Failure of Romanticism.**

Romanticism does not fail as a system that supports itself and that eats the world. At that, it is a great success, one of the greatest in the history of the world as far as I can tell. I don't go into Romanticism that way here.

Romanticism always fails because it does not deliver much satisfaction unless people happen to be in a triumphant group or a good little group – and that is usually short-lived. It does not give people access to the Spirit. In the end, it does not make them feel as if they are contributing to a project that will lead to the triumph of the Spirit for the whole world.

In fairness, I repeat that Romanticism does a lot of good along the way. It gives people commitment and energy. It focuses people on real short term problems that need work. It has contributed greatly to the success of important movements such as Civil Rights, gender equality, saving nature, pro life, pro choice, and the conservative revival.

Romanticism also contributes energy to bad movements such as bombing abortion clinics, the nasty self-righteous versions of PC, terrorism, and glamorizing of thugs. Romanticism does not fail mostly because those movements are more important than the good movements. All good religions also contribute to bad ideas and bad movements, and that does not make the religions bad. These bad movements contribute to the failure of Romanticism but they do not alone cause the failure. These movements are what most people think about when they think of the failure of modern ideology but we could deal with this crap if we could think straight otherwise.

To fully explain how Romanticism fails, I would have to explain how bad systems that eat the world work, and what life is like in such a system. I can't explain here; I do explain in other writing. Think of living as a real gangster or living in Stalinism.

Romanticism fails because it does not solve deep problems but instead keeps people busy on lesser problems and deliberately steers people away from deep root problems. If people could solve most deep root problems, or even see them clearly, Romanticism would not be useful and would disappear. Seeing exactly how Romanticism avoids deep problems would require going into the logic of Romanticism more than I can in this chapter but I go into it enough so you get the idea.

Romanticism fails because, ultimately, it does not rest on any deep true morality. Romanticism is not an idea; it is a process. A process does not need a particular idea. If a process did rest on an idea, it would be in danger of failing when the idea was not right enough, or too wrong, or when a better idea came up.

As long as a process does not rest on a particular idea but can pretend it rests on a lot of little ideas, then it can keep going indefinitely.

Just because Romanticism does not espouse any particular morality does not mean it espouses moral relativity, moral subjectivism, or the morality of power. It can use them but it does not base itself on them any more than on traditional Christian morality. Romanticism simply uses whatever morality works best in keeping itself going. That might sound like moral relativity or subjectivism but is not. I cannot pursue this topic anymore without pursuing it a lot more, so I drop it here.

Romanticism fails because emotion and commitment alone cannot solve our problems. When we rely on emotion and commitment alone or even predominantly, we do not get good white wizards who combine Reason with Passion. We always get dark wizards who mix bitterness, jealousy, anger, and revenge with Cunning. We never get Luke Skywalker or Obiwan Kenobe; we never get the Jedi after they are allowed to marry and have families; we always get the Emperor Palatine the Sith Darth Sidious. We don't get the Three Musketeers; we get Cardinal Richelieu, the one-eyed swordsman, and Madame De Winter. We rarely get Washington, Jefferson, or Lincoln; we get Stalin or Hitler. We rarely get the good American Revolution. We get the bad French, Russian, Chinese, and North Korean Revolutions. We don't get a sensible right or left; we get the culture wars, huge debt, stagnating wages, and widening wealth gaps.

Recall that systems-that-eat-the world usually have a big hole in the center onto which people can project whatever they need. That is how the system keeps going. Romanticism has that in the Spirit and in the things that we do in the name of the Spirit but that really serve us. Like Jesus, God, Allah, the Dharma, or the bodhisattva at the center, Romanticism has the Spirit, on which people project whatever they need but which is ultimately empty itself. That is a source of great strength if you want to succeed as a system but a failure if you want to give people a real moral meaningful useful godly life.

Romanticism fails because it overlooks real problems and distracts us with short-term problems. We feel Passionate, Justified, and Saved when we accuse a co-worker or racism, sexism, or coddling terrorists and forget about what causes racism, sexism, or terrorism.

Romanticism skips the square-meal diet to give us a diet of yogurt with a lot of sugar, "power bars", and honey-glued oat bran, or nothing but pizza, fried chicken, burgers, and barbecue, all while convincing us that this is healthy. Romanticism leads us to self-induced diabetes while it convinces us this is how we should eat. For our self-induced diabetes, we take pills rather than find out what ails us, find out what is a good diet, eat a good diet, and exercise well.

The effects of the failure of Romanticism are the same as the effects of Culmination. We feel more alone and isolated even in the middle of causes. The failure does not lead us to re-evaluate, quit what we are doing wrong, and change. The failure leads us to "double down". We accentuate the bad tendencies in capitalism. We become more selfish, materialistic, and trendy. We jump from cause to cause. We seek God in some really strange ways. We try really hard not to think too deeply. To escape isolation, we hold to Romanticism even more. The effects of the failure cause us to embrace Romanticism all the more, and so we live in a bad system that eats the world.

## **PART 6: Brief History A: Real Problems and Self-Made Institutions**

Romanticism derives much of its strength because we feel that our institutions don't work well enough, so we should connect to something else, something deeper. Romanticism solidified in a climate of distrust. At the same time, Romanticism gives us mid-level issues that we use to avoid deep issues. Not seeing deep issues perpetuates our distrust of institutions.

### **The Insoluble Issues.**

For a list of insoluble issues, see Chapter Two on my political stance.

### **Ourselves to Blame Makes it Worse.**

Traditional religious people say people in general believed in the Church and Christendom before about 1600. I am not sure Romanticism would disappear if people believed in their institutions now as in that ideal past. Romanticism does better when people are skeptical enough about institutions but have to keep them. Romanticism doesn't take much skepticism; we have more than enough in democracy no matter how well things are going.

Conservatives say that institutions that develop on their own almost always are better than the institutions that people make deliberately, especially in Christendom where conservatives say the Holy Spirit had a hand in developing institutions. We distrust our institutions now because we made them; we did not allow enough space for the Holy Spirit to guide the natural growth of our institutions.

We distrust institutions enough to foster Romanticism and it is not likely we will grow to trust them much more in the near future. I think we distrust them because they do not succeed well enough, regardless of the Holy Spirit. They do not succeed well enough because they are not up to the problems of the modern world. Democracy is not up to the modern world. Democracy is not up to the modern world partly due to Romanticism. Romanticism, the failure of democracy, distrust of democracy, and more Romanticism, feed on each other. It is easier to see this dilemma in historical context and in light of democracy as an institution that we make for ourselves.

Until about 1700, people did not consciously make their own institutions. Institutions grew in conditions; and institutions dealt with local conditions well enough. Two examples might be Medieval England and town-level America in the 1950s. People believed in the leaders, ideas, and institutions even if nobody consciously made them into a rational system. In fact, people believed more just because ideas and institutions were not the obvious products of the human mind but seem to come on us like God setting things right.

By 1600 in England, and certainly after 1776 and the American Revolution, people deliberately did make their own political institutions. That is a large part of what democracy is: people making their own social and political lives. By the standards then and for the next 150 years, Americans made their institutions pretty well. We took into account human nature, nature, and good ideas from the past. Yet American people-made institutions did eventually fail then and still fail. Even when we adjust them to make up for failures and for new conditions, they still fail. We have not had institutions that grow on their own, and that work, to replace the institutions that we made ourselves, that don't work. We are stuck in our own

self-made, ideology-based, rational, systematic, as-good-as-we-can-do institutions that still fail. Although capitalism did evolve on its own somewhat, I include it among the institutions that we mostly made for ourselves, for reasons I don't defend here.

The facts that institutions that we made failed, we can't come up with anything better, and we can't adjust them to work, forms a problem that compounds itself. We made the institutions to solve other problems, and now the institutions have become among the most serious of problems. What institutions do we now make to solve the problem that we can't make institutions that work?

Because we will live in some version of democracy for the near future, all the institutions to come will be made by people. Even if the stems come up on their own, as with the Internet and social media, still, institutions will be shaped by deliberate planning. All the institutions will be made by people in the sense that the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution were made by us. Such people-made institutions have failed in the past and likely will fail in the near future. Our institutions are pretty good but they are not good enough.

Institutions that evolved on their own before 1600 succeeded because they had to deal only with simpler problems – invading barbarians, how much to tax whiskey - than after the Revolution: industrialization, capitalism, big business, worker poverty, cities, and issues listed in Chapter Two. It is hard to imagine self-arising institutions that could deal with international capitalism or the demise of nature. We should not fault people-made institutions hard for not being able to deal with the world. No institutions that we have now, or are likely to have in the near future, can deal well with the problems that we face now. We are likely to need a bigger dose of inspired individual people.

## **PART 7: Brief History B: How Romanticism Came Together**

### **Old History.**

Something like Romanticism has arisen several times in the West. In the time of Augustus Caesar in Rome, about the time of Jesus, old patterns did not work; Augustus pushed through new patterns. At the same time, Neo-Platonism mixed with yearnings of uniting ecstatically with "the One". People indulged many cults, believed belonging to a cult was doing the work of the Spirit and coming closer to the Spirit, and believed cults deserved special privilege. Saint Augustine was a Christian Neo-Platonist. His use of God and the City in history is like the Romantic use of the Spirit, nations, and material stuff in history. In the middle ages, the Albigensian movement gave France and England minstrel culture with ideals of love – I think it is a parent of opera, blues, pop song, rock, and even hip hop. The Christian Church killed it. Celtic and Norse mythology seem more similar to Romanticism than Greek-Latin-Christian rationality is similar to Romanticism, and, I think, they contributed to Romanticism.

### **The Enlightenment.**

The Enlightenment lasted from about 1600 to 1850 in northwestern Europe and the parts of the Americas under the control of Northwestern Europe. Not all people in Enlightenment areas were wise because people still burned witches. The Enlightenment thrived where people of different classes, cultures, and religions mixed in an orderly place, usually in towns for commerce. Nearly all the major people in the

American Revolution were of the Enlightenment. The Declaration of Independence and Constitution are Enlightenment texts. Although it no longer guides America, Americans know Enlightenment ideals: decency, reason, rationality, thoughtful belief in God, natural morality, universal morality, distrust of raw emotion, moderate emotion, comfort in moderate emotion, science, natural laws, rule of man-made law in government, stewardship of nature, progress, seeking greater good, individual freedom, individual responsibility, democracy, not simplistic populism, representational democracy, naturally gifted people (natural elites) as leaders, compromise, and distrust of class society.

### **Collapse and Romantic Rebuild.**

Traditionalists and conservatives blame science, philosophy, and new political ideas for the collapse of the old social-religious order and the rise of modern angst, particularly after the French Revolution of 1789. They blame those forces for modern isolation, selfishness, materialism, trendiness, lack of faith, cultish dogmatism, power struggles, populist democracy despotism, and bad feelings. Traditionalists and conservatives are partly right but mostly wrong. Changing economic and social conditions were more important factors although people always used ideas to justify what they wanted to do and to intensify changes that were made possible for other reasons.

Capitalism changed the social order beginning in the early 1600s. Industrialism and science changed the social order quickly after about 1750. A new group of people arose with wealth and power. Often they were at odds with the old order, old aristocracy, and old religion. Along with them had come another new group of workers who were poor and isolated. These are the conditions that Dickens relates in his books and that form the basis for the stereotyped view of bad capitalism.

The new business people saw themselves as self-made and individualistic men (rarely women). They adapted the Protestant Ethic to Capitalism. They wanted justification for their new way of life. When they adopted the Protestant Ethic, at first they secularized it because traditional religion and institutions could not provide them with the ratification they needed. A good example is the Autobiography of Ben Franklin. Better examples are Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jeremy Bentham. This is what modern traditionalists and conservatives see in philosophy of the time and wrongly blame for changes. The situation in Europe and the United States around 1800 was like the situation around Nepal at the time of the Buddha when the rising warrior class rejected Brahmin religion for the individualism and self-determination taught by the young Buddha.

While the new people rose and the old social order fell into disarray, two important events shaped how people thought about the changes. The American Revolution succeeded and seemed to validate the idea that people could rationally make their own institutions and their institutions could succeed. At first, the American Revolution brought about only a modest rational version of the new ideas. The Americans kept historical context, especially their legacy from England, and they changed only what they needed. Then the French Revolution of 1789 erupted and failed. It brought stronger versions of the ideas divorced from any historical context. It brought chaos and death. People did not stop pushing the new ideas because it was hard to go back to the past, especially when past institutions clearly could not deal with modern life. People did stop believing humans could rationally make their own successful institutions based on human reason. People sought order in something other than rationality. They turned to the spiritualized emotion and irrationality of Romanticism. New thinkers believed Passion could give them new institutions just as

old thinkers said the Holy Spirit had given them old institutions. Passion could guide the new ideas to the needed new institutions. If reasoning with the enemy won't work, then out-yell the enemy or out-connive the enemy. The work G.W.F. Hegel clearly shows this new direction.

In Europe and the Americas, if traditional religion had assessed the new situation and responded quickly, the new capitalists and workers might have kept traditional religion strong. But traditional religion was too slow, so the people turned to something else. They turned to Romanticism, in behavior if not in name. It is important to see that people could be Romantic and hold to the forms of traditional religion at the same time. Like Hinduism, Romanticism does not demand you reject your old religion, at least in outward form. Like Hinduism, it does change your inner view.

Romanticism offered people ratification through working on projects of the Spirit and through working on your own projects that you could think of as of the Spirit. Projects had to use rationality to the extent that they used Wit and Reason but projects were ultimately based on Passion, that is, Faith. You could be both rational and emotional at the same time or more in particular situations as needed. You could base institutions on the faith (Passion) that they were projects of the Spirit and use Reason to carry them out. You could use old traditional ideas as useful and discard otherwise. People could take the role of rebel or Remnant, or both, as desired. Romanticism could apply to individuals, middle-sized groups, or the whole society. Romanticism fused the Spirit with the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.

When Romanticism arose, capitalism and traditional religion were at odds. Also, capitalism had not yet served society in general and had not yet raised the standards of living for everybody. It did give many individual people enough wealth and independence so they could think of themselves as self-made men and see in their wealth the basis for their autonomy, power, and social position. It served as the material basis for rising new democracies. Yet people then had no simple single ideology they could turn to, and they faced a plethora of new confusing Protestant groups. Again, the old religions and institutions had failed. Under those conditions, the combination of Romanticism and capitalism, stressed the tendencies in both toward individualism, isolation, selfishness, trends, dogmas, and irrationality under the guise of rationality in projects. The idea of Progress from the Enlightenment became, in Romanticism, the dogma of the perpetual unfolding of the Spirit, always going on in various particular projects, never complete in any particular project or in the parade of projects.

After about 1850 in Europe and after the Civil War in the United States, capitalists had consolidated their power, wealth, and hold on politics; and workers began to be better off. Capitalists and workers began to see themselves in terms of groups rather than only as isolated individuals. Capitalists wanted to make sense of the new world and their new dominance as kings had done in the late middle ages with Divine Right. Capitalists and workers sought ratification in traditional religion, and traditional religion sought to lean on their power and wealth. Thinkers arose to interpret traditional religion in terms to make capitalists and workers feel better, or feel better about forming groups and doing battle. We get modern American versions of Methodism, Baptists, Lutheranism, and eventually Roman Catholicism. We get the success of new Christian religions such as Latter Day Saints, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the fundamentalism that arose after 1910 in Los Angeles. We get moderate middle class socialism as in the "Fabians" and the "Bloomsbury Group" in England. Selfishness, materialism, and trendiness did not go away – Protestant sects of all kinds and Roman Catholic specialist groups still sprung up like weeds – but selfishness etc. took other forms and might have abated somewhat. Materialism and trendiness held up

pretty well in the “Gilded Age” of the late 1800s and “Jazz Age” of the 1920s. Yet just because capitalists, workers, dogmas, selfishness, materialism, trendiness, and traditional religion all adjusted to each other, Romanticism emerged stronger and more entrenched. Rather than traditional religion, Romanticism lay beneath it all. That is where we still live now.

We can get back to the thread that we pulled to begin with, selfishness, materialism, and trendiness, to see how they fit into the history, after we look at modern life in Romanticism.

### **PART 8: Modern Life in Romanticism.**

Because most of us live in Romanticism, trying to see Romanticism objectively is like a fish trying to get out of the water to see water objectively. I know of the similarities between my stance and Romanticism but I don't bring out the points to defend my stance. The best way to get out of any bad stance is to have a better stance that you can adopt. Even then, it is hard. If you don't like my stance, make an alternative yourself. If you think your Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, atheism, mechanistic philosophy, or academic trend is not Romantic, and is a real alternative, you might be right, but I think you should think more deeply.

### **Romanticism Is a Process.**

Romanticism is a process more than it is a set of ideas, symbols, attitudes, or a world view although it has all those and uses them. It has some typical content but it does not require any particular content. It is a way of keeping people engaged in particular affairs while leading them to think they are engaged in affairs more important. It is a way of keeping people from seeing whether what they do makes a difference and instead to keep them focused on gratification from the situation right now.

Romanticism is a process in which people can feel heroic, spiritual, hip, cool, justified, and important, by indulging emotions, taking attitudes, keeping busy, joining causes, opposing bad guys, feeling entitled, sampling exotic other lives, fighting as rebels, fighting as a small remnant band to save the correct way of life, living the good life, or, sometimes, just getting rich. Romanticism glamorizes the world rather than shows the native beauty and value of the world. In glamorizing, it takes away from true beauty and value. Romanticism makes people dissatisfied with the merely real, true, and worthwhile. Romanticism makes things other than they simply are, to glamorize them and spiritualize them, so people can feel distracted fooling around with otherwise mundane and boring life. Romanticism co-opts other dogmas (ideologies, ideas, and religions) to serve it even when another dogma thinks it has nothing to do with Romanticism or opposes it. Romanticism expands to use up much of our minds and lives. It is a way of getting what we want while seeming to work for something bigger and better. Romanticism is the “drama queen” and “reality TV queen” of Western stances. It is a never-ending series of engaging episodes in which nothing ever really changes much. It is a sanctified mix of romantic comedy, action movie, video game, and endless show about nothing. Rarely do people feel indulgent when they follow Romanticism to indulge themselves; they feel correct, justified, heroic, they represent everybody's deep rights, and entitled.

### **Hopefully a Short Way to Get a Feel for Romanticism.**

The best way to get a feel for Romanticism is to sample the social world around us, including social ideas of nature. It is all mostly Romantic.

One shortcut is to intensively sample hyper-Romantic views. Watch a lot of TV for a week. Just because you have watched a lot of TV your whole life doesn't mean you noticed the right things. Watch everything including especially what you don't like. You will get a feel for how it all presents a world to you, a world that is created from a bigger world. That smaller created world will be one version of the Romantic world. If you can't sample a lot of different TV, try this: if you don't like country music or hip-hop, then watch the Country channel and Black channels. If you don't like romantic comedies, watch those. If you don't like sci-fi or adventure, watch those. If you can't stand religious channels, try those. Watch only children's TV. If you have watched any of these before as a member of a social group, watch alone. Any of this watching will shock you out of some parts of Romanticism even if not all the way out. If you can't stand that much TV, try books that you would not usually read such as romance novels or sci-fi novels. Until you have seen a lot of pop culture, avoid "serious" media and literature. The bias is just as strong on "classy" shows such as "Downton Abbey", but is more clever, hidden, woven into deeper themes, does not stand alone, and easier to miss. Video games are heavily Romantic but I don't know enough about them to make many suggestions. Even the childish sexist games with scantily clad women with huge teats are heavily Romantic.

If you feel brave enough, go to a series of religious or political meetings from groups not your own. If you are a lefty, go to at least half-a-dozen meetings of the young Republicans. If you are a Republican, go to at least half-a-dozen meetings of the local "save nature" or feminist group. If you are a Roman Catholic, find charismatic Protestants. If a Protestant, find a Roman Catholic Church in which the members are active and follow the traditional liturgy and offices.

Then go back to what you usually like and try to see it as a variation of what you didn't like. Try to see yourself as a variation of some of the characters that you just saw.

### **A Brief but Hard Way to See; and the Implications.**

After you read this chapter, pick one problem of modern life, such as capitalism, and think it all the way through to the bottom in human nature, technology, human social life, and as a system. Don't rely on what experts say or on textbooks, although you should consult them. Then read about the problem, from all sides, and think it through again. Think it through completely yourself. Think until you are sure you know how to solve the problem in a way consistent with human nature and human social life, a way that would work if it could be put in place. Think about what your ideas say for Romanticism. Think about what you believed all along before you thought it out.

As a citizen of a democracy, regardless of Romanticism, and apart from any mental exercises, you are responsible for doing this task, not just to know capitalism, but for all the issues facing your nation and the world. You, personally, individually, without allowing anybody to think for you, must think through all the issues that your democracy faces. If you do not, you are not entitled to be a citizen. If you cannot, then you should think about what the implications are for democracy. How is democracy supposed to work if you, a smart citizen, cannot think through the issues? How do you expect to be able to elect people to

think out the issues for you, your representatives, if you cannot think out the issues yourself? How does your failure support Romanticism?

### **Keep Romantic Failure in Mind.**

In the end, Romanticism fails as a way for many people to find a good life and fails as a way to organize society so that most people in the society find a good life. The Dark Side wins. Even when experienced people try to unite the Light Side and Dark Side, the Dark Side prevails. Romanticism always goes bad. We cannot unite the Dark Side and Light Side into a good way. We cannot unite reason and emotion in a good way that merges them both in a bigger better unity. Romanticism does not necessarily fail for some minority of people, some minority of people can do quite well, but it fails generally.

Romanticism goes bad in the same way the French Revolution went bad, Lefties always squabble until they fall apart, Fascism failed, raw capitalism fails, marriages go sour, politicians sell out, young people age, and zealotry never delivers the shiny new world that we hope for. It is not just that reality can never live up to our ideals, and our ideals are far away from real human nature, but, more, there is something about the process of pushing dreams that insures they go bad. In particular, there is something about relying on emotion to be always good and always to lead us to the best outcome that insures it will turn nasty and lead to a bad place instead. Something about trusting raw emotion turns reason into cunning. When we rely on emotion, it always turns into nastiness and cunning. I can't explain entirely why this happens here; see the additional material on the logic of Romanticism. For here, accept that it happens.

### **Suited to Our Times.**

Romanticism is suited to our times in the same way rock-and-roll is suited to middle class kids who, in a few years, have to give their lives over to work but don't have to work for their lives yet, might have a job now, have free time and money, and glamorize the unknown lifestyles of other socio-economic classes, races, cultures, and nations to make their own lives tolerable. It is suited to our times in the same way Black kids, and White kids who have never seen a gangster, stupidly glamorize "gangstas". Romanticism fits the way White kids in America used to glamorize working class rockers, the way Black kids think all Black people are put down by "the man" and think Black people could solve all problems for themselves by overcoming "the man". It fits the way Black people think White people have everything and are in a giant secret cabal to keep it. Romanticism fits the same way urban half-educated college grads in the Third World glamorize peasants in their own country. It fits the same way business people glamorize entrepreneurs, "job creators", and anyone richer than they are. It fits the same way college professors want to appear on the Daily Show with Jon Stewart and wanted to appear the defunct Colbert Report. It helps individual people and business firms rationalize their entitlement check.

The movie "Travels of Sullivan" by Frank Capra shows the kind of flitting and seeking after the Spirit that is typical of our times, and the harm that comes. It shows what good comes of giving up Romantic flitting and instead working as a useful person by doing what you do well. It shows how to escape Romanticism for people of our times. It is really fun to watch.

### **Some Allusions.**

Living in Romanticism is like living in the movies “Rear Window” and “Vertigo” by Alfred Hitchcock; the TV show “Castle” did a fun version of “Rear Window”. Living in Romanticism is like being trapped in the TV show “I Love Lucy” when Lucy runs a scheme - always. The famous episode in which Lucy and Ethyl try to eat their way out of a chocolate assembly line is pretty much life in Romanticism. Rather than accept the reality of our abilities and of the task at hand, we stuff our mouths with sweets that should be a great delight but only make us sick. Each piece of chocolate is a dogma, cause, attitude, or role. Rather than Lucy “splaining” to Ricky, we have to explain to ourselves.

We live not only in one episode, we live in a never-ending series of episodes like a never-ending story. Rather than think it through, we “just know” that we know more than other people. What we know could avert disaster. Other people should help us but instead they scoff and hinder. We are rebels out to help people who should help themselves but don’t know enough. We are rebels out to save a situation that many people don’t even know needs saving. Despite the resistance of others, we cling to our beliefs. Finally a few people believe us enough to go along for awhile. Little clues begin to add up. We are right. Last minute action saves the day. We don’t expect a reward but are gratified by gratitude. The political versions are commitment to dogma such as “freedom”, “justice”, “equality”, and “save the unborn”. Then it all begins again. The academic version is commitment to an ideology such as, in anthropology, “social facts”, culture, structure, contextualization, deconstruction, process, evolution, Darwinian psychology, commodity theory, power, etc.

Modern stories about detectives, ghosts, bizarrely crazy people, aberrant mindsets that make their own kind of sense, criminal masterminds, people who want to take over the world, serial killers, and dedicated men-and-women who stop them, all arose in the early 1800s with Romanticism. Americans know Edgar Allen Poe and give him the honor of inventing the detective story and modern horror story but the honor likely belongs to the German Ernst Theodor Amadeus (Wilhelm) (E.T.A.) Hoffman a decade before Poe. He wrote the story that became “The Nutcracker”. To show links between Romanticism and these forms is another book but here I can point out a few ties between Romanticism and detective stories. The detective story depends on a secret, usually about a crime that happened in the past, often because of an aberrant mindset or deed. The story needs a social misfit rebel to uncover the secret. Usually the secret is about a family that seems normal outside but grew from a twisted root. When the detective uncovers the secret, the family, and society, comes to a resolution and a new better order begins. Then the detective goes on to solve the next crime in an unending process. Think how the other kinds of stories match the Romantic pattern.

In some fairy stores and other Celtic stories: this world would be the best heaven we could have if it didn’t suffer the troubles artificially made by people and especially by lords. If the world were well run, then the normal life of romantic love, marriage, family, work, crafts, kin, farming, drinking, eating, and celebrating would be as good as a sentient-moral-aesthetic being could want. Squabbles would not ruin this world and actually would enhance it. This kind of world could go on forever and nobody would get bored. Time does not pass in this world as in ours. For charming modern variations on this vision, read the short stories of J.R.R. Tolkien or think about Hobbit land after the War. Then something always undercuts paradise. This motif might be more widespread in Indo-European culture than fairy and Celtic stories. Something like it also shows up in Taoist stories from China.

Romanticism promises something like the never-ending heaven-like joy of normal life. Then the world of Romanticism goes wrong not in a small way that enhances the world but in a big way that ruins the world. Romanticism does not account for how it goes wrong. Romanticism never sees that what goes wrong is in Romanticism itself. Trying to glamorize never-ending-normal-life forces life to go wrong. Glamorizing this life is what both makes Romanticism possible and makes sure it will fail.

Most people have had situations in their lives that feel like home and to which they want to return: finding your music, hunting with buddies, seeing the whole Star Wars saga, have a great run of parties, etc. This is the modern equivalent of a fairy land that goes on and on in its own time, a world much like our world and that is better than heaven. This is what Romanticism offers but cannot deliver. The yearning for this kind of fairy land can be deep and not getting it can be as painful as any drug withdrawal. We would do a lot to live in it always.

### **Some Pop Song.**

The musician Lou Reed both promoted and satirized Romanticism. Below are excerpts from his song “Heroin” – maybe excerpts will promote sales and so I can avoid a lawsuit. “Smack” is heroin. The Spirit tries to use sticky material stuff (“smack”) as a means to spiritual ends. The eyedropper is a particular project of the Spirit. The movement of the Spirit that should end in the fusion of the material and the Spirit ends in the sadness of bad Passion and Cunning. The final worst is politics. Compare Reed’s “Heroin” with Tennyson’s poem “Ulysses” – it is easy and fun to read. Van Dyke Parks’ album “Jump” shows: going out from self, forgetting self, dividing into self and other, excluding other, alienation, anger, blaming, sin, class struggle, and inevitable politics. It is also fun and has catchy tunes. The duet that Parks sings with his son about God not forsaking us is chilling. Van Morrison in all of his phases is Romantic, romantic, and always charming. Like Reed, David Bowie both used and satirized Romanticism. Some is biting and funny, such as “Young Americans”. His work shows the role of attitude, such as “Fame”. All Bob Dylan’s work is Romantic. I like him through “Self Portrait”. Then, bad glamorizing wins out. Dylan’s albums of the 1970s are paradigms of how the bored American middle class uses Romanticism to fool itself, self-indulge, feel heroic, identify with a fantasy rebel underbelly, and evade reality, in particular the album “Blood on the Tracks” and the hit songs “Tangled Up in Blue” and “Hurricane”.

From “Heroin” by Lou Reed:

I have made a big decision  
 I’m gonna try to nullify my life  
 ‘Cause when the smack begins to flow  
 When it shoots up the dropper’s neck  
 When I’m closing in on death  
 I wish that  
 I was born a thousand years ago  
 I wish that  
 I’d sailed the darkened seas  
 On a great big clipper ship  
 Going from this land here to that  
 In a sailor’s suit and cap

Away from big cities  
Where a man cannot be free  
Of all the evils in this town  
Of himself and those around  
Everybody putting everybody else down  
All the politicians making crazy sounds  
All the dead bodies piled up in mounds  
And I guess but I just don't know  
And I guess but I just don't know

Romanticism has shaped pop ideas of journeys of discovery, artists, vampires, werewolves, zombies, evil geniuses who want the world, heroes who fight evil geniuses, heroic archaeologists, bad ass daughters of archaeologists, luminal suspension, death, living on in death, in-between shadow lands, suicide, serial killers, people who hunt serial killers, religion, religious conflict, and politics.

### **Detectives, Mad World Conquerors, and Serial Killers.**

Particular projects of the Spirit are qualitatively distinct; one project cannot measure another; and often one project cannot even understand another: Hindus cannot understand Taoists, and Protestants cannot judge Roman Catholics. Individual people are like projects. We are unique. One person cannot judge another; and often one person cannot understand another.

This view forces a gap between projects, cultures, societies, mindsets, art, and persons. While the Spirit is unfolding, as long as the Spirit revels in particular projects, and as long as we are satisfied with our role in particular projects, this gap is not so important. But if we really want to understand the Spirit, especially as the Culmination of the Spirit is upon us, and we really want to be in the mainline of the Spirit, then this gap can be a problem. We have to be able to read across mindsets and people. We have to be able to see into people. We have to see how their mindset makes them do what they do, how they “tick”. We have to be able to infer a mindset, even a complex convoluted mindset with motives unlike ours, from what people do and the clues that they leave.

We have to become mental detectives. We have to expect odd criminals with elaborate mindsets, and we have to be able to unravel even an odd perverted mindset. To do this, we have to be able to put ourselves in the heads of even demented criminals. We have to use the clues they leave, and their acts, as evidence to get inside their heads. Thus is born the modern detective. I add nothing here.

The Spirit is the spirit of the whole world. The Spirit does work through particular projects but some of them are really big. In the end, in the Culmination, the Spirit will reveal itself to the whole world as the Spirit. “In the end, there can be only one”. This is already happening.

It is good if we work with the Spirit and know it, but not everyone works with the Spirit. The world is full of leftover projects of the Spirit and leftover persons; in modern terms, of leftover programs as in the movie series “The Matrix”. Like the Spirit, and like Satan the Adversary in Christianity, these people want to be the world. Because they cannot be the world in the same sense as the Spirit unfolds into the world and is the world, they do the next best thing for them: they conquer the world. Villains always want to conquer

the world. They are not satisfied with sex, money, sensual gratification, or artistic achievement. They are not satisfied to be as powerful as other villains, and as free from harm as anybody on Earth including free from the harm of other such villains. They want it all. They want to impose their will. Rather than unfold themselves by helping other persons act, as the Spirit does with persons, these villains want to impose their will and make their will the only will. To defeat them, we cannot use force alone, as Jesus would not use force alone against the Devil. To defeat them, we must do what the Spirit does, like James Bond, we must use our wits and we have to enlist the aid of friends and other good people. We have to get into their heads. We have to be detectives and fighters. Thus is born the agent of good against evil, even if he-she doesn't know that is what he-she is.

The Spirit and Life have a close relation. I do not go into the logic or the history of this link from Judaism and Christianity. The Spirit promotes life. The birth of a new project is like the birth of a new life. While the Spirit also takes away projects and life, the Spirit does it in the right time, with the right emotion, and with the right reasons. Who imitates the Spirit but is not the Spirit and so interjects the wrong time, bad emotion, and Cunning? A serial killer is like this. The killing is part of a scenario, that is, a project. It has reasons like a work of art but it has bad cunning reasons. Because the killing is only an imitation of the Spirit, it can never give satisfaction as does the work of the Spirit even if the killer gets a temporary thrill and thinks he-she is satisfied. New killings are not new projects like the projects of the Spirit. They do not make anything new even if they are conducted like dramas. To stop all this, we need someone who can get into the mind of the serial killer. We need the mental detective again.

In daily life before the modern world, most people lived in one mindset, culture, society, or paradigm. I do not say they had no hardship or confusion, only that most people lived in one world. In daily life in the modern world, we face many projects, worlds, mindsets, cultures, societies, groups, paradigms, and kinds of persons. These "others" want things, often things we don't understand. We have to give them what they want or deny them. Even in one family in one culture, life can seem like this because parents are not children, children are not of the same age, and boys are not girls. We have to be mental detectives whether we like it or not. We are not always sure we are on the right side, and we can drift into dark bad thoughts. It is comforting to see on TV or in movies, people similar to us but maybe smarter than us, who have to deal with the same problems but on a vastly larger scale. It is comforting to see them win almost all the time even when they undergo hardships and have to pay a price. It is comforting to see a good guy take on the mindset of a bad guy, become a bad guy, and emerge on the other side still sane and good. That is one reason why we find mental detectives so appealing even when they fight serial killers and villains who want to take over the world.

### **Economics as Romanticism.**

It helps to look at something that we think is un-Romantic as Romantic. Because of its important role, capitalism is a good choice. To describe capitalism as Romantic does not mean economics is not a solid social science or capitalism is a plot that does no good. I like economics and capitalism. Still, cultural ideologies intrude into our lives where we least expect. Ironically, most critics of economics attack it from a Romantic point of view, thus showing how Romanticism really does "get us coming and going".

In economics, people are made of Passion and Reason. Passion comes out in all the desires for goods that people want, including material goods (bread, cars, TV sets), services (manicure, watching sports on

TV), social relations (friendship, gossiping), deeper social relations (spouse, children), and even choice of religion (Lutheran or Methodist). Reason is how people go about satisfying their Passions. Reason serves Passion. Under the right conditions, that is under a fair economy, Passion is overwhelmingly good. Passion and Reason is rational strategic thinking. In economics, Reason in the service of Passion is smart shopping. Economists don't usually stress this aspect, but a person can be "chaotic". Passions are irrational in that they are not necessarily rational. They just are. People want what they want, and that is that. This is a kind of chaos. Yet, in the right situations, the chaos of each person can be creative. The right situations are when Passion guides Reason to smart shopping in a fair economy. Then people are Creative Chaos using Reason to serve Passion to create themselves and recreate the economy.

We need food, clothing, shelter, and raw materials from the material world but the material world is not rational, it is chaotic. The material world acts on us, too often hurting us. We need to tame the material world and to get out of the material world what we need. That is what business firms do. They impose Reason on the chaos of the material world to make chaos creative. They impose scientific production processes on the material world to create stuff. They use Creative Chaos to make stuff that we consumers want. They are smart producers as consumers are smart shoppers.

Business firms do have a Passion, and that is Profit. They pursue their Passion with complete rational Reason. Passion guides their Reason. The Reason of scientific production and the Reason of pursuing profit are aspects of the same Reason that serves the Passion of firms. Thus Reason serves Passion, that is, Profit, even among business firms. Whether the drive for Profit is an example of Creative Chaos, I do not go into here, but the simple answer is "yes".

In pursuing Profit with their Reason, business firms make the goods that consumers want. That is how firms and consumers get together. They get together on the free market, they get together best there, and that is the only place they get together best. So, in the right situations, a fair economy, this relation harnesses chaos to make it creative and to serve the Passion of consumers. It is Reason in the service of good Passion. The free market is the "good family arena" of capitalism.

In a fair economy, the Passion of consumers united with Reason of Consumers meets with the Passion of business firms united with the Reason of business firms, to harness chaos, make chaos creative, and find the good Passion needs of consumers and firms. People get what they want and firms make a proper profit. Smart shopping and smart producing are good Passion united with Reason to create a beneficial economy. This is the ideal free enterprise fair competition capitalist economy.

As long as the economy is fair, the union of good Passion with Reason (the smart shopping of consumers and smart production of business firms) results in the greatest welfare for all consumers (most happiness, satisfaction, and goodness). This is truly good Passion guiding Reason.

Business firms meet consumers in the free fair market. The free fair market is where good Passion unites with reason to tame chaos, make chaos creative, and find the greatest welfare for everybody. The free market is where the new order is forged (synthesized) and re-forged from potential chaos and potential opposites. The free market is where the proper order overcomes disorder and avoids hyper-order. The term "the free market" is shorthand for all of this.

When consumers act as smart shoppers to choose goods (and services), and business firms act as smart producers to make goods, both use their Wit to unify Passion and Reason in a higher movement and higher form.

The role of Intuition and Wit shows up best in new ideas, inventions, products, marketing, shows, and movies. Business firms show Intuition and Wit when they dream up and develop new products. Looking at the life of Steve Jobs, can anyone doubt the role of Intuition and Wit? Not only firms but consumers show some Intuition and Wit when they respond to new products or develop new technology in the areas that please them. The development of social media and Internet videos is the expression of consumer Intuition and Wit, and one of the most important new forms of the Spirit.

Like almost all human products, nearly everything sold in the market combines both material and idea or material and spiritual. A smart phone isn't just a device; it is a way of life. You don't just eat a fast food lunch; you give yourself what you deserve. You don't just drive a car; you drive a wild strong animal or a classy luxury name from the days of car glory. You don't buy insurance; you buy peace of mind. You don't watch a TV show; you watch what your guys watch. The modern economy combines the material and spiritual. The modern economy is an extension of the essential human combination of the material and spiritual that the Spirit likes so much. The modern economy is project of the Spirit that is realized through the combination of producers and consumers, material and spiritual.

Bad chaos intrudes partly in the acts of business firms who are "crooked" and make bad products or offer bad services. Economists use the term "deliberate unfair competition" or deliberate "market structuring" for what people call the Cunning of bad business firms. As long as the economy is fair, the union of good Passion with Reason suppresses bad chaos, bad Passion, and Cunning. Bad business firms and bad products go away automatically. Because consumers are smart shoppers, they unite good Passion with Reason, they are able to keep track of good and bad firms over the long run, they shop exclusively with good firms over the long run, and thus they drive out bad firms over the long run.

Creative Chaos, good Passion, and the Reason of the economy is best represented by business people, innovators, entrepreneurs, and "job creators". When the economy is running smoothly, these people are its Reason-based Jedi, like the old Jedi council. When the economy is "out of whack" and threatened by bad Passion and Disorder (bad Reason), then these people naturally arise to set things right again. They are the rebels that unite Sith Passion and Jedi Reason into a system that is better than either. Then they are like Jedi united with good Sith to make something even better.

Sometimes, the actions of bad firms call attention to the system, and we want to intervene in the system. In this case, bad hyper-order comes from an interventionist state that seeks to take over our Passion (our demand). Bad hyper-order is like chaos that has not yet been made creative. These interventionists are like the hyper-ordered non-creative sterile Jedi council before the Jedi united with the Sith. They are the misguided Liberal state that seeks to force all the people into one seemingly rational, but wrong, ideal of what is best. They tell us what we want, what to make, and how to make it. In this situation, Cunning is collectivist policy. The best antidote is a freer fairer economy that again makes chaos creative and unites good Passion with smart shopping and smart producing.

Hyper-Reason interventionist policies actually serve to invite the bad Passion and Cunning of bad firms and bad people. Bad policies turn Creative Chaos into simple chaos. They invite bad Sith to arise as bad business people, products, or political leaders. They invite bad people to institute their own hyper-order as fascism, and to do so in the name of a false free market. Cunning is the kind of cooperation between business and government that we see in the classic Fascist states of World War Two, in China, and in the pro-business policies of the Republican Party. It is what economists used to call “mercantilism”. Bad interventionist policies invite bad Passion and Cunning. Economists say business firms and people arise who “seek rent” from the government. The correct antidote is taming chaos to make it creative through Reason in the service of good Passion, and so to create the proper new order based on smart shopping from consumers and smart producing from business firms.

This picture is closer to reality than naïve critics of the free market know. Regardless of how realistic all this is, we do think this way. If you believe this story is a fantasy tale with no effect on how people think or what they do, or no effect on state policy, then talk to a free market economist, politician, or right wing TV commentator. Read the classical texts of economics. That does not mean it is false.

### **Back to Selfishness, Materialism, and Trendiness.**

Recall that the Spirit is alone even in wholeness, and is fractured, isolated, and alone when it is out on its many projects. We are like small versions of the Spirit. We drift into isolation, unable to connect to other people. They are unable to connect to us. We “do our own thing”, carry out our own projects, convinced that we can gain satisfaction that way, but failing. When we fail, we do not assess our situation but instead embark on another project hoping that will give us satisfaction where the previous project failed. This is not yet selfishness but it is easy to see how it can lead to selfishness in the right conditions.

In ideology, capitalism thinks in terms of isolated strategic individuals and isolated strategic competing business firms. Firms that do not pursue profit, and only profit, with ruthless efficiency, disappear. The satisfaction, or “utility”, of one individual cannot be compared to the satisfaction of another. The only thing people want, and the only thing that people can get, is satisfaction. We can only know what we want and we can only go after what we want. We cannot help anybody find satisfaction and we can't really get our own satisfaction from the happiness of anybody else. In reality, this is not true, but it can be true enough so that people do feel alone.

When Romanticism and capitalism combine under the right conditions, then people can feel the isolation and selfishness that critics of modern times complain about. On the other hand, people do not have to feel this as much as critics complain about. I am not sure if Romanticism-plus-capitalism leads people to feel more isolated and selfish than other systems; as I said before, I have seen selfish isolated farmers, and ideally they are supposed to be happy community members. Probably when we feel our institutions are not working properly and that our actions are useless, then we probably also feel alone and turn to selfish behavior and selfish buying. That might be easier to do under Romanticism. It seems to happen enough for it to be a chronic problem but not so strongly that we can't fight it.

The Spirit uses the material world for spiritual ends. Christianity teaches that we are a blend of material and spiritual, the material can serve the spiritual, and the blend is superior to either pure extreme (except with God who is a pure spirit but superior to us). We can only get at the spiritual through the material. So

I can imagine Romanticism that is not crassly materialistic. I can imagine materialism that deliberately seeks a good blend of the spiritual and material in proper projects, such as, feeding the poor, making a discovery in science, or even helping to feed and house your own family. Yet, when conditions thwart spiritual work, when the institutions that we made ourselves don't work as they should, and, at the same time, institutions such as the capitalist market give us a lot of toys to play with such as TV sets, smart phones, "phablets", cars, and drones, then it is easy to seek in material stuff the satisfaction that we do not get in spiritual work. It is easy to see in toys minor projects of the Spirit and to seek in them what we should seek in greater projects of the Spirit. It is Spiritual to be on the cutting edge of technology. It is spiritual to be a smart shopper and to buy a lot. We can't get real satisfaction that way but we can chase a Spirit substitute in the form of another material-semi-spiritual toy. We can see another movie, buy a nice car, or buy clothes that just look and feel really good.

The Spirit always has a project and never runs out of projects. The Spirit never settles into one project for all time. Each project must end, and another project must begin. On the other hand, projects of the Spirit are amazing and can last hundreds, thousands, or millions of years. The Earth is a project of the Spirit, and it has been going for at least four billion years. Humanity is a project of the Spirit, and is at least five million years old. Even projects that the Spirit uses people to do, such as Classical Greece and Rome, India, or democracy, are big and take hundreds of years. Even with human projects, the Spirit has only a few big ones going at once. So, if we imitate the Spirit, we keep busy, but we keep busy on projects that make a real difference, and we have only one or two at a time.

By now, you should see where this is going. A project can be a trend and a trend can be a project. If we do not feel deep satisfaction with any activity (cause etc.) then we can feel it is not really of the Spirit, and we should drop it. Because we never settle deep issues, we can never really deeply feel that our actions are of the Spirit. The capitalist market is tremendously successful not only at giving us material goods but at giving us trends. Instead of settling the question of chronic unemployment, we can listen to another piece of hip-hip, rock, or hip-hop culture or watch another movie. We can figure out the latest big thing. We can find the latest quality must-see TV before anybody else. When other institutions and nor working well, trendiness is not only a cure for boredom but is positively spiritual.

Where the actual balance falls, how trendy anyone is, depends on the personality of that person and on how that person can find real activities to get interested in other than trends. Because our institutions are not working as they should, we always feel a little off-center and willing to dip into trends. It is only natural to do wonder what others are doing and to do it too. What is the latest academic idea from Europe? So nobody except a dedicated monk ever totally avoids trends, or should. If our institutions are working well and we feel that our actions have real good results, then we don't waste our life in trends, we only have some natural fun with them. I don't know how to compare recent America because no other place in the history of the world has had so many opportunities for trends. Even if we felt tremendously satisfied with our institutions and our contributions, we would still have more opportunities than the most unhappy peon in Medieval Europe and would play with more trends than the Czars of the 1700s. Every minor league "foody" in America eats better than most French kings until about 1600. Marketers and our friends are amazingly clever at getting us involved in trends. As a wild guess, I would say that Americans are a bit less satisfied with their lives and a bit more trendy, especially more than I dream about, but they are ready to put down trends and so some hard un-fashionable work when called on and when they think it will help.

I leave it to you to assess how much blame should fall on Romanticism alone without other conditions. The real point is to see the overall pattern and to seek ways out while still having some fun.

### **Dogma.**

This section is an introduction to a larger issue that I can't go into here. For fun, see the movie "Dogma" by Kevin Smith, who also did "Mall Rats", "Clerks", and "Jersey Girl". I think he is a good sincere Roman Catholic Christian who, through his movies, tries to interpret Roman Catholic ideas so they are relevant to our world and not mere dogmas. Contrasts between noise and silence in the movie, especially by God, comment on dogma. His idea of forgiveness in "Clerks" is far beyond any forgiving that I can muster, and, I think, what Jesus had in mind.

I have said that I dislike dogma. Dogma differs from principles mixed with practicality; and the teachings of Jesus are not dogma. Some conservatives dislike dogma. They see nearly all the ideas of the left as dogma, and blame that dogma for all modern malaise. I agree a bit but disagree more. As they are used, conservative ideas are as much dogma as ideas of the left. Conservatives cannot offer a program based only on old traditions, without using ideas, without using new ideas, and then those ideas turn into bad dogma. If it were used correctly, the idea of the free market would be good but in conservative practice it turns into a bad dogma, and could be used by them no other way. To show how I see dogma and how I compare to conservatives would require looking into how ideas turn into dogma under any system and then especially under conservative practice. That is too much for here.

Consider the idea of "freedom". As people commonly understand the idea, it does more good than harm. Who wants to live under political, social, or cultural tyranny? If we do not hold the idea strongly enough, then we lapse into slavery. We have all heard "freedom is not free", and it is true. Now consider absolute freedom. Everybody gets to do what he-she wants with little regard for any other person or thing; and everybody expects the state to back him-her. Obviously this has become right without responsibility and is wicked. That is typical of ideas turning into dogma. Consider the idea of "equality". Gross inequality of wealth or rank is disgusting, morally disgusting, hurts society, and hurts the economy. On the other hand, it is not true that everybody has equal ability and equal drive. We want people to be rewarded according to ability and drive, and we want people to be able to give to their families according to what they have earned with their talent and work. We cannot make sure that everybody has the same income or wealth. We cannot make sure everybody has a good job, nice house, excellent schools, state-of-the-art medical care throughout an un-naturally prolonged life, and absolutely the same say in all political affairs. We cannot make everybody just as smart and just as talented. Trying to force too much equality turns into collectivist tyranny and another form of even-worse inequality; that is the lesson of "Animal Farm" and of the short-story-turned-into-movie "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut.

Ideas tend to turn into dogmas under systems like liberalism, conservatism, traditional religion, and Romanticism. Sometimes, as in good Buddhism, the middle path is the best way to see an idea and use an idea, and the best way to keep it from turning into a dogma. But the middle way is not always best. What we need is experience and good thinking. That is just what dogma blocks. Dogma sustains itself. Dogma is often part of a system that eats the world. Both lefties and righties are equally blameworthy.

How this happens, and to what ideas it happens, varies with the socio-economic-cultural system, and it varies with particular conditions of the system at particular times. There is no good short analysis of this effect to refer to.

So, the questions for here should be:

- Is dogma more prevalent in modern life than before?
- Do people live more by dogma in modern life than they lived by good ideas before?
- What kind of dogmas are most prevalent, and why?
- Does Romanticism turn ideas into dogma?
- Is glamorization of dogma under Romanticism distinct from the spiritualization of dogma in traditional religion?
- Do the common dogmas in modern life serve Romanticism?
- When does Romanticism lead to more or less dogma?
- How does trust in institutions and belief in the good effects of our acts influence how good ideas turn into bad dogmas, and which ideas turn into dogmas?
- How does the Romantic idea of the project lie behind the Romantic treatment of ideas and dogma?
- Does the Romantic use of ideas and dogmas favor moral relativity and moral absolutism?
- What roles do capitalism and populist democracy play? How do they interact with Romanticism? Which system takes the lead?

The brief answers are: Modern life has more ideas than previous periods. We do tend to turn ideas into dogmas, and we stick with them enough to cause harm. We also hop between dogmas like trends when that suits us. We treat dogmas like projects. I cannot go into which ideas we tend to treat as dogmas. I think Romanticism is more prone to dogmas than some other systems; I don't know how it compares to traditional Christianity or to ideal liberalism. The Romantic use of dogma leads to both moral relativity and absolutism. Romantic glamorization is much like spiritualization in traditional religion. The Romantic use of dogma reinforces Romanticism. Capitalism and populist democracy started carrying the ball but not Romanticism has picked it up and controls the game. Capitalism and populist democracy continue to play big roles helping Romanticism.

### **PART 9: Assessment of Romanticism.**

Recall that Romanticism always fails for people in general and for society as a whole, at least in the ways that matter. The institutions that we make to serve the Spirit in democracy don't work out. The labor we

should do as part of the Spirit doesn't work out. Failure creates anxiety. We can't alleviate the anxiety by quitting on democracy or the Spirit. We find other reasons for failure. We look for people to blame other than us. Rich people blame poor. Poor people blame rich. Black people blame Whites, and vice versa. And so on.

The people who get blamed, even the rich, conservatives, and Republicans, can now claim status as a marginalized group, part of the underbelly, the rebel vanguard of the Spirit, and entitled. They have even more right to blame other groups and to receive benefits.

So a strange self-sustaining vibration develops between many groups, all claiming to be the vanguard of the Spirit, to represent creativity and life, to be at the center of democracy and the Spirit and marginalized at the same time, and all claiming entitlement. Sometimes this situation is funny but mostly it is sad.

### **So Much Spirituality.**

Almost everybody likes to think of him-herself as spiritual and likes to think of his-her life as in tune with the Spirit and adding to the work of the Spirit. Before Romanticism, people wanted this but not everybody thought he-she really was holy and working for the Spirit. People might have thought they were part of a social body and the social body was sanctified but they did not think they in particular were sanctified. In Medieval Europe, a bishop was sanctified but not a cobbler. A king might have thought he was sanctified but a peasant thought he-she was sanctified only through playing a good part in the kingdom. People did not think they were participating in God if they joined a movement such as peasant revolt. I doubt Lady Godiva thought not paying taxes was holy even if justified.

Now, whether we admit it or not, we hope we often participate in the Spirit, and that our projects, if not our jobs, are of the Spirit. We seek movements that link us to the Spirit. "Pro Life" and "Pro Choice" are not just movements, not just about women, and not even just about morality, but about the work of the Spirit in our time. The sociologist Max Weber might have said this is a natural extension of the Protestant idea of the "calling" to God and of our life and occupation as a "profession" of God. I would not dispute Weber but I think this desire to see of our lives spiritually also is a tendency that has roots in human nature and Indo-European culture, and comes out strongly with Romanticism.

All this might be merely one of the charming features of Romanticism except that it has a couple of strong results, two bad and one good.

First, we want to think our occupations are part of the work of the Spirit. In fact, a lowly clerk actually is an important part of a big system and he-she helps other people more than he-she knows. But we don't feel that way. We feel tiny in our jobs. We feel our jobs hinder the work of the Spirit. That feeling makes us restless. It contributes to the search for projects to make us feel holy. It contributes to confusion over our relation to the Spirit and the play of the Spirit in the world.

Second, except for Robin Hood (Wood) and his Band of Merry Men (and women), people did not think bandits were doing the work of the Spirit until about the same time Romanticism arose, about the middle 1700s. Then we get the romantic and Romantic "highwayman". Even Robin Hood in his modern form does not date to the middle ages but to Walter Scott in the late 1700s in novel "Ivanhoe". Peasants have

long glamorized bandits as rebels against lords but nobody saw bandits and nasty people as more sacred than a farmer or worker. Nobody would have glamorized gamblers and thieves as we now do the lower classes and some criminals. Think of they appear in many movies after about 1980, including a couple of really good movies such as “The Grifters”. All “film noire” glamorizes the underbelly of society even if the characters “get theirs” in the end. Glamorizing the underbelly and bad people has had bad results, the least of which is that our minds are foggy.

The Sherlock Holmes saga, especially the recent movies with Robert Downey Jr. and Jude Law, is an exercise in heroes joining the underbelly while trying not to lose themselves in it. Moriarty and Holmes take on aspects of the lower classes and use them. Yet both also draw a clear line between themselves and the lower classes and make a point of being able to jump out of the lower classes. Watson remains aloof although he often has more human sympathy toward poor people than either Holmes or Moriarty. Charles Dickens is drawn to the lower classes and criminals, and sees their humanity, but does not make the mistake of trusting them or wanting to be them. His heroes (and heroines) want to get out of the typical crime-ridden lower class. Fagin was not a good guy. Oliver Twist had to betray Fagin. Modern people are not as good at getting into and out of the lower classes as Holmes, Moriarty, Watson, or the man characters of Dickens.

Sometime after Dickens and Doyle, we stepped over the line into glamorizing the underbelly without also seeing its faults. We have fallen into our own trap of glamorizing the lower classes and non-White ethnic groups. We want to be the glamorous version of them, not the real one. Movies such as “Donnie Brasco” and movies about soldiers who do “questionable things” in battle, such as “American Sniper”, show what happens when we cross the line and struggle getting back. The “Spaghetti Western” series starring Clint Eastwood, and his movie “Grand Torino”, show people straddling the line more than Holmes but finally drawing a line and staying on the good side. Some Bond movies push this theme. Revenge movies such as “The Losers” show what happens when some good guys do lose their way.

Especially since World War Two, we have let bad people get away with a lot of bad crap because they put on the Romantic mantle of the downtrodden lower classes and non-White ethnics. We do a lot of silly things because we take on our own made-up role of the glamorized lower class rebel. I take up this topic again in the chapter on decency and indecency.

One of the bad mistakes we make is to demonize the police, especially in their relations to Blacks and other non-White ethnic groups. I am not trying to “whitewash the cops”. I know about mistakes and bad attitudes. The police do far more good than bad and they are not the agents of the devil oppressing the Spirit as the Spirit tries to rise out of the Creative Chaos of non-White ethnicity and the social underbelly. Romantic glamorization makes us unable to assess correctly and do the right thing. We need to get rid of Romantic blinders so we can see clearly and figure out the right thing.

Glamorizing the lower classes and identifying with them goes with demonizing rich people and business firms and wanting to reject them. It goes along with seeing the police as simply tools of the rich. How socio-economic class and Romanticism fit together is beyond the scope of this book. It is a mistake to think one simply makes the other but they do interact.

Third, on the good side, allowing that people other than aristocrats might be doing the work of the Spirit has gone a long way toward extending human kindness beyond the usual limits of our group and our lords. Modern people are good at seeing the human side of other people even if we glamorize it and make it unrealistic. Glamorizing the humanity of other people is better than refusing to see it at all and so making an excuse to hurt them. Extending the Spirit to other people is doing the work of Jesus even if we have to glamorize it. Without being able to see other people as children of the Spirit and as doing the Work of the Spirit, we would not have had the Civil Rights movement, Gay rights, feminism, or the labor movement. We would not have helped poor people in the Third World. We would not have sent food and medical care.

### **(1) Assessing Bad Effects.**

All the numbered sections in this sequence belong to my assessment of Romanticism.

It is hard to assess Romanticism briefly. First, it includes features that are found in other stances but it uses the features differently. Second, when we find a dominant stance that we don't like, we blame all problems on it. So, when people are selfish, entitled, zealous, or overly herd-like, I can say Romanticism did it even when it didn't. I would guess that Romanticism causes about half the pain while particular faults and other stances cause the other half.

One way to assess a stance is to list effects, find what effects have in common, find what makes an effect distinct, and trace it all back to themes in the stance. I can do that with Romanticism but don't have the space. Instead, first I state a few assessments and then focus on one relation: how Romanticism adds to the problems in democracy.

I prefer the stodgy Jedi Council to dramatic Sith and glorious rebels. The Enlightenment view, relying on a good mix of reason and emotion, is true enough while the Romantic view is more than false enough. I know reason cannot give us all we need. I enjoy passion and think it is an integral part of our lives. But I prefer the mix of passion and reason not be a glamorized mystical union, not be ruled entirely by passion, and not be awash in bad passions and cunning. Passion alone cannot save us. The union of Passion and Reason, supposedly led by good Passion, cannot save us. When we indulge our passions, inevitably we fall into bad passion and cunning. I am not at all cunning and I don't want to develop that skill. I want to keep good and bad. I want to enjoy good passions and control bad passions. I prefer that the mix of reason and passion lie closer to the feeling that comes with simple acts of decency and goodness. I prefer that the mix actually includes a big helping of reason by way of principles. Principles are one big correct way to mix reason, passion, creativity, and goodness.

### **(2) Romanticism Helps Erode Democracy.**

After the Great Depression, the rise of big government and big business, the rise of one world economy, and the oil shocks of the 1970s, democracy could not handle most international problems and many domestic problems. The people will not support political parties that tell the full truth and will not elect officials who tell the full truth and really do something. Each subgroup insists on a minimum of power and prosperity and is willing to diminish the total power and prosperity of the nation to get it. We are happy to destroy nature for power and prosperity now. We would rather indulge in short term acts that make us

feel good now than deal with big problems over the long term. We willingly hurt our own nation so much that eventually it must diminish and our own group suffers too.

This behavior is not limited to democracy, or to democracy under Romanticism, but Romanticism makes it worse in democracy. When world conditions got bad enough, Romanticism made this kind of behavior so bad under democracy that democracy started failing. This is where we stand now.

In describing how Romanticism hurts democracy, I don't describe all the problems of democracy or the worst problems. I choose among problems to convey an idea. I don't describe simply seeking power as when political parties curry favor with ethnic groups, immigrants, and the military. I disparage Left and Right equally. I repeat from Chapter Two on my political values. The causes that serve as the focus of bad Romantic action are not necessarily bad in themselves. In fact, usually they are good and quite worthwhile. The people who pursue them for Romantic reasons do not help the causes and sometimes hurt the cause. They pursue the causes out of proportion (irrationally) so that they do not get at the roots of problems and they neglect other more pressing issues.

=> People learn how to use Romantic ideology for their gain even when they don't know it is ideology or Romantic. The fact that anybody does this, along with the specific things people do, undermine self-government and undermine relations between groups in democracy. People, and groups including ethnic, gender, religious, and socio-economic class, present themselves not only as disadvantaged and entitled but also as people who have a special relation with the Spirit and are specially entitled. They present themselves as rebels or as the Remnant. They present themselves as lively, creative, artistic, and the embodiment of Creative Chaos. Blacks have rhythm while Whites have harmony and melody and so both are the Creative Chaos of the Spirit and entitled. Blacks are rebels while Whites are the Remnant preserving order. Blacks are the holy Remnant who bring back to us ideas of humanity and kindness. Whites are the creative rebels who drive business and science, and so bring a better life to everybody. All these special claims hurt everybody.

=> As I wrote this, a flood of women and children were coming into the United States illegally from Central America. They said they were coming to avoid the drug gangs that had arisen along new drug routes in Central America after the U.S. slowed smuggling through the Caribbean. Allow that what "illegals" say about drug gangs is true. What will happen if we let them stay? In three years, or five, another wave will come using the same reason. Along with them will come many tens of thousands who do not flee drug gangs but take advantage of the situation to seek jobs in the United States. It will happen over and over again. We cannot deal with this issue until we deal with the drug market in the United States. In the meantime, we cannot allow hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants into the U.S. annually. Yet the Left, including Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, supports allowing these people in. As far as I can tell, the Left gives no thought as to the root problem in the drug wars, does not say how to solve that problem, and ignores that waves of illegal immigration will recur and recur. It cannot separate fleeing for safety from coming to the U.S. for economic gain. Why does the Left champion these "illegals" but gives no thought to the causes and the future? Because to do so allows middle and upper class people on the Left to feel good about themselves. The typically middle class families of the Left will suffer little in the short run while the working class families of the Republican Right will take the biggest hit. The Left can feel like rebels against the heartless Republican power structure. They put their feelings before the true needs of the nation, the countries that are being hurt by drug gangs, and the world. Illegal immigrants, and some

of their supporters here, know that Americans are susceptible to this kind of argument and so cast themselves in light of this predicament regardless of reality.

=> The spending habits of the United States federal government are insane, and the spending of the states is not saner. The Right blames personal entitlement while the Left blames military spending. Because I just criticized the Left, here I criticize the Right. Ignore the dubious benefits of heavy military spending. If the United States dominated the world economy as it did from after World War Two until about 1970, then the United States could afford to play world police officer and it might even gain more than it lost. The world has changed. We cannot spend our enemies into defeat now. We must have help dealing with Russia and China, and fighting Muslim extremists yet we get help only from a handful of long-term allies. No matter how much a country badmouthed us in the past, when any country needs help, they call on the United States, they expect to get it, and we do give it. America leads the fight against Ebola. We can't afford this and it is not bringing us more than it costs, not even in goodwill. Despite what Vladimir Putin did to the Ukraine, we will not fight a tank war in Europe. We do not need tens of thousands of American soldiers now in South Korea. We do not need even half the military bases we have. We could end half the weapons systems we have and stop development of half the systems that are in the works. A smaller military that worked better with global partners would be more effective. Yet any attempt to scale down meets a Republican chorus for more military, soldiers, missions, bases, and weapons. The defenders of the military think they are patriots and are the rebel minority crusaders against the liberals who would sell out America. They are a small band of heroes keeping the dream of a godly kingdom alive. They are the small hard kernel of resistance against bad chaos. They are both rebels and the remnant. They are the only ones able to harness Creative Chaos. If America can keep the peace on its terms long enough, eventually world capitalism will triumph, there will be a new synthesis, and their order will be the right new order. Running around helping countries is part of the price the Right Wing pays for being the moral leading edge and keeping the moral leading edge.

=> As I wrote this, fast food workers around the United States were calling for a raise in the minimum wage from about \$7 per hour to at least \$10 per hour. They hoped for about \$15 per hour. I don't know what the leaders had in mind for benefits. If we accept that the minimum wage defines how Americans should live at the least, then activists had a point. Compared to average wages and to the buying power of wages, the minimum wage in 2014 is the lowest since the 1970s, maybe ever. In contrast to before 1990 when most fast food workers were young people without families, now many, likely most, fast food workers are full adults with families. The minimum wage will not support a family and will not even make a significant contribution to a group of adult earners trying to support a family together. Republicans allowed the erosion of the minimum wage despite inflation and changes in the work force as their way of eliminating the minimum wage altogether – if the official minimum wage is below the market minimum wage, then, in effect, there is no official minimum wage. The Left was solidly behind workers and against Republicans. Again, the Left did not think it through but jumped on a rebel train instead.

Much as I dislike giving Republicans credit for any sense, they are right about some things. Here is what the Left overlooked in its crusade to be the small band of rebel working class heroes representing the aching masses who cannot represent themselves: Most jobs that would fall under a raise in the minimum wage could easily be mechanized. Look at the register at a fast food place. It does not have numerals; it has little icons of food. It is easy to replace a register operated by an employee with a touch-pad in which customers directly enter orders, even at the drive-through. It is easy to replace a janitor with a small robot

that cleans floors. Even if a job cannot be mechanized, employers will simply do without positions that do not pay for themselves. If the minimum wage rises, many people will be out of a job entirely, and the rate of unemployment will rise. Many people are not smart enough, and do not have enough real education (not a phony piece of paper) to get a decent job. If crappy jobs are not available to them, they will not find a job at all. If they are displaced from a crappy job, they will not find another crappy job. Who says that all jobs in the United States must pay enough so that one person holding that job, that is, a single parent, can raise a family, all by him-herself? It is unreasonable to think this. Only if we had few single parents and a lot of other people who held good jobs and could afford to support the single parents through their taxes can we think this. Now, we have a lot of single parents and few people who can afford to help them through paying taxes. If a person thinks he-she might be a single parent then he-she should make sure he-she can support a family on whatever job he-she gets. He-she should not expect the state to be the other parent or to take over in case of an emergency or in cases inflation overtakes borderline wages. If he-she can only get a crappy job (as long as the market is fairly fair), then he-she should not expect help from the state to support his-her desire to reproduce. If he-she cannot get a job good enough to support a family then he-she should not have a family. The people of the United States have to think about the world economy, the place of the United States in the world economy, what kind of jobs the U.S. can have for a variety of people with a variety of skill levels, if all those jobs can provide enough to raise a family, what to do about people who cannot get jobs, and what to do about people who can only get jobs that are not enough to raise a family. What role will education play? Can we make phony paper education into real education? We have to think about why there are so many single parents with crappy jobs out there, and why they expect the state to raise their family for them. We won't do any of this as long as we act primarily on the basis of being rebel crusaders for our favorite dogma.

=> The Tea Party arose after about 2008 and it was behind a couple of shut-downs of the government. At first, Republican leaders drove the shutdowns because they mistook the situation. The Tea Party sees itself as the rebel band leading the next coming of the Spirit. The Republicans thought they could play rebels too, play magicians, or both. That only works if your guys win. When the last big shutdown lost heavily in the eyes of the American people, the Republican Party had a setback until it swore that it would never shut down the government again. The shutdown of the state cost the whole nation, not just the government, dearly both in terms of business now and in terms of reputation and business in the long run. We need to be clear why the Tea Party and Republicans did what they did. A few Tea Party members thought they were helping America but not many Republicans were that foolish. The vast majority of Republicans did this as a dogma stunt. They were setting up the Romantic scenario and their part in it. They were willing to do this regardless of how it hurt the country. Fortunately, the American people saw through this drama and made some good decisions.

=> In 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, the young Black man Michael Brown assaulted a police officer, and then the police officer shot and killed him. I don't give details. As I wrote this, a grand jury decided not to indict the police officer for any crime. For weeks after the shooting, protests, violence, riots, and looting occurred around Ferguson. With the grand jury decision, they resumed more intensely. The majority of the activists were Blacks but a few Whites joined. Most Blacks were young; the Whites ranged in age. They complained that White people still look down on Blacks, and White police officers stop more Blacks, search more Blacks, hurt more Blacks, and kill more Blacks than police officers of any color do to Whites. Statistically, in some ways, this is true. We have to ask: Are police officers largely justified? Blacks and supporters say officers are not. I believe police officers are largely justified. But that is not the main

point here. Assume Blacks are correct, so that racial prejudice distorts how police officers treat Blacks. While a big point, that is not the main point that should be taken. The fact that protesters made a big deal out of police prejudice and violence toward Blacks covered up a more important point. The covering up is only possible because of the Romantic mindset that lets protestors think they are rebels against “the man” and fighters for a new order when really what protestors are doing is making themselves feel good while avoiding a worse problem. I am not blaming the victim here but I will be blamed.

The real problem is violence among Blacks and what creates violence among Blacks. I cannot go into detail about what lies behind Black crime and Black-on-Black violence. Structural forces play a role such as lack of good jobs and the abysmal Black schools. Cultural forces play a role such as a generally high tolerance for violence and the belief that violence solves problems well. Unless Blacks take care of Black crime and Black-on-Black violence, then protests against police violence against Blacks are a token at best. They are a criminal self-delusion at worst because they cover up the real problems.

Every year in America, a couple hundred Blacks, nearly all criminals, are killed by police officers. I don't know how many of the officers are what ethnic group. Every year, thousands of Blacks kill Blacks. The murder rate among Blacks is higher than for any other major ethnic group. The crime rate among Blacks is higher. As long as crime and murder rates among Blacks are so high, the police must be suspicious and must be ready to respond to violence. Even Blacks need wariness by the police to keep order within the Black community. Some police officers might use wariness as an excuse to vent prejudice but the underlying problem of Black violence is still there. Until underlying Black crime and violence diminish, then, even if police act out of prejudice, police still must act. When police act, some Blacks will die. If police could totally eliminate prejudice, then the rate at which Blacks died would lessen by a small amount but only a small amount. White people are only a small part of the problem. The police are only a small part of the problem. The damage done to the Black community would lessen far more if Blacks would diminish crime and violence among Blacks. Energy spent fighting crime and violence in the Black community would do far more good than energy spent fighting prejudice among Whites even if the police are badly prejudiced. Blacks do stage token rallies against crime and violence – to which Whites almost never come – but the rallies do nothing to stop crime and violence.

Blacks know all this. If Blacks know all this, then why do they spend so much energy against police and so little energy fighting Black violence and crime? By the same logic that a Black person might use to blame a White person, I must say Blacks do it because it makes them feel good, not because it really helps. The same is true of Whites who join protests. When I see a Black leader protest police violence, I know he-she has not faced up to Black crime and violence. I see a Romantic hypocrite using and hurting his-her own people. Blacks won't face up to, and deal with, the real issues.

Blacks can't afford this anymore. Other ethnic groups can't afford it. Democracy can't afford it.

=> Everybody knows that America has the highest murder rate among developed countries and that murder is done by guns. Both sides of the gun issue are self-deluded Romantics, and their delusion allows them to feel good about themselves while pushing focus off the main issue. We might not be able to do much about the main issue but we can face what is going on and stop fooling ourselves. Fooling ourselves about issues like this shows how we fool ourselves in general. For example, take assault weapons and background checks. Despite the use of assault weapons in some truly horrible mass

murders, assault weapons are used in less than 1% of gun murders in the United States. I don't know what percentage of gun murders are done by mentally deranged people but I doubt it is 10%. The vast majority of gun murders are done by people at home or in the neighborhood; who get into an argument over sex, booze, or drugs; and grab a handy pistol. I am not sure since the rise of the 9mm, but, a few years ago, most murders were done with 22 caliber pistols that would not be stopped by current laws. We would stop only a few murders if we forced background checks and banned assault weapons. Checks are costly and they annoy decent gun users. Still, it would not be much trouble to have some checks. Likewise, assault weapons have almost no practical purpose. They are not good hunting weapons. They are not good for home defense. You can't carry them for self-defense. Their main purpose is to let a small group of silly grim guys shoot up the range. It is not a great hardship to ban assault weapons. People against guns would do more good if they forgot about background checks and assault weapons to instead focus on cheap available handguns. Gun lovers would protect rights better and do more good if they allowed checks and they stopped touting assault weapons. So why do people argue about background checks and assault weapons while overlooking the problem with cheap readily available handguns? That would be a hard problem to solve. People who defend gun rights fear that background checks and banning assault weapons is the first step in getting rid of all handguns. People who want to control handguns see that gun lovers will never face the greater issue of gun crime. Both sides say they are the small band of rebel crusaders for the true rights of Americans. They are the rebels fighting for the true order against a horrible oppressive other. Both insist they are on the side of life; I don't explain their arguments for how they are on the side of life. They keep themselves busy fighting over non-issues so that they can feel good and so they can avoid the real issues.

=> Is "we hate all abortions and all people who have abortions" really "pro life"? Is "please just let me alone to have my abortion in private and to get on with my life" really "pro choice"? Then why do the groups present themselves as "pro this or that"? I have written about abortion elsewhere (see website) where I explain that the state must allow some acts that particular groups hold against their private morality. A modern pluralistic democracy likely has to allow some abortion even if many citizens believe abortion is immoral. It is not necessary to accept my stance to get what I say here but I like readers to know my stance. The key insight here comes not from the "pro" part of the positions because everybody wants to be pro something. The key insight here comes from "life" and "choice". While not only Romantic buzzwords, these are Romantic buzzwords. They are used by a group of people to present themselves as those who know better intellectually and spiritually, and who safeguard morality and life from the large clumsy current state (government) that is anti-life and anti-choice. They are rebels of the Spirit. They are the better new order. They defend the downtrodden innocent who can't defend themselves. They are the voice of Creative Chaos. Especially in the "pro life" movement, the real force seems to me less love for life than dislike for some people and the desire to control the families and reproductive lives of young women. The force behind "choice" is most obvious not among the Left but among the Right who use "choice" as a Romantic buzzword to confuse people and gain power for business groups and politicians. Women of the Left have adopted the Right use of the word and so have adopted the Right ploy of confusion and control. When we get confused about something as basic as "choice" and "life", we are really confused.

=> Women need to get past general feelings of dissatisfaction and rebellion instead to focus on a few issues that can really make a difference for them and everyone. I suggest focusing on equal pay for equal work. Despite some solid gains, crusading as sisters in the vanguard of the new world has not

helped them to reach what they need. The leadership of the movement need to stop seeing themselves as rebels for the new order, see themselves as something else, and see the whole picture. Women in general need to reject leaders who sell themselves primarily as rebels and who want them to act mostly as rebels. Figure out what you want most, figure out how to get it, and then do it.

I think Sigmund Freud said “What do women want?”, and I now throw myself into the despised camp of mere men. In the 1970s, I saw a TV show in which a man about sixty years old, an old activist, was trying to talk with a young woman activist. The two talked past each other. Eventually the woman insisted that men were pigs because they wouldn’t put the toilet seat down. The man looked sheepish and said “Why should the toilet seat be down?” The woman got angry. Clearly he meant: in an equal society, neither men nor women are privileged; people have to take responsibility for themselves; to demand that the seat always be down is to demand a social order in which one gender is publicly privileged over the other; and that is exactly what women should NOT want; to insist men guard the toilet seat is to say women can’t take care of themselves, men have to take care of women, so men are superior to women; and we have to get beyond simple chivalry to talk human to human. Toilet seats are not the great symbols of respect and equality. The woman missed the point. Women have been asking for chivalry for tens of thousands of years. If all women get is chivalry, then we all have lost ground. It was painful to watch.

In the 1960s, women burned bras. In the 1970s, women poured into the workforce, wore combat boots, and bought clothes from Diane Von Furstenberg. In the 1980s, women moved into professions, wore big shoulders and big hair, or wore their stockings outside their dress. In the 1990s, women invaded the arts, wore bad shoes again, and got tattoos. In the 2000s, women ran up against the world economy, and rediscovered fashions from the 1960s before about 1967. I am not sure what happened after about 2010. In each wave, women saw themselves as rebels. In each decade big business firms were able to sell products by appealing to women as rebels, empowered, and in charge of your life; if you buy the right toilet cleaner, you are an empowered rebel in charge of your life.

At this point, I was going to provide a list of all the causes that women have take as “women’s causes” but the list got so long that the exercise pooped out. I invite you to make a list. There are three points. First, women could not possibly go after all these causes to the extent that they cause deserves or needs if it is to be solved. Women have to choose. When each woman chooses her own, no cause is well supported and adequately achieved. Women feel guilty about all the causes they don’t support, especially if a cause they don’t support fails badly or succeeds despite their absence. Second, the vast majority of causes are what were stereotyped “women’s causes” long before the women’s movement, such as daycare for working mothers or getting men to stop telling sex jokes in the workplace. There is nothing wrong with these causes but they have little to do with women as humans rather than as female family leaders. Third, some of these causes are not really women’s causes but causes for the whole society, and benefit the whole society rather than just women, such as good education and good healthcare for children. They should be pursued in that way rather than as part of the women’s movement. The women’s movement can take up these causes after it has achieved the goals that pertain to it specifically. These uses of the women’s movement misuse the movement and detract from the focus that is needed for success.

About 1970, women got about 65% of what a man got for comparable work; in 2014, women get about 70% of what a man gets for comparable work. Before about 2000, in a recession, women lost their jobs;

since 2000, in a depression, men lose their jobs. Now women have to support families on their 70%. At the same time, the cost of raising a family has increased tremendously, primarily because we won't deal with the problem of getting a good education (mostly for your children) and the effect that the search for a good education has on housing, job, and credit markets. None of this is enough progress. Buying the right stuff so you can be an empowered rebel taking charge of your life is not working out as it should. I suggest focusing on equal pay, and letting bras, toilet seats, and sex jokes take care of themselves. If women need a couple of causes at a time, they might add day care and paternity leave into the mix, but not much more.

Why do I as a man have to tell women all this? Because the women's movement was run as a Romantic movement, so it did not often enough focus on issues that really mattered and it fizzled when its thrill as a rebel cause ran out.

If women are mired in symbolic rebellion, and are easily manipulated by advertising, while women make up most of the voters, then democracy is not representing what women, men, children, and everyone really needs. I am not saying men would do a better job; they haven't; and wouldn't. I am saying nobody does a good enough job because we all see ourselves in ways that don't do enough real good, wander off into activities that use our energy uselessly, and don't let us focus on the right moves. Women are not magically more adept citizens and better people because their cause is just.

I am not trying to make women feel guilty. If they fail utterly, that will not by itself cause America to fail. If they succeed completely, that will not by itself save America. Every big part helps. To contribute as much as they can, it would help women to get past Romantic mistakes.

### **(3) Other Romantic Problems.**

In the modern world, rebellion does make some sense. But most modern rebellion is silly self-serving posing even when it costs posers dearly. When rebellion is useful, it is best not to think of it in cosmic heroic terms but instead simply to get the job done. When rebels think of themselves in cosmic terms, they rarely do a job that lasts a long time. The Chinese Communist rebels did not get very far until they in effect gave up cosmic Communist ideology for practical export-driven capitalism.

Romanticism supports ideologies that seem incompatible and it supports ideologies that can only be called bad. I cannot think of any good ideologies that rely on Romanticism for their primary support. It is not clear what the ideologies have to have in common for Romanticism to support them but might be that the social whole dominates the individual or that one socio-economic class dominates society. Fascism and Communism both were Romantic ideologies with the same roots in German Romanticism. German Fascism was a racist ideology where the people of Northern Europe represented the Spirit in its current rise. Communism was supposed to be a class-based ideology although it too had ethnic roots and it was seen along ethnic lines in Russia, Eastern Europe, China, Vietnam, and Latin America. In accepted Communist ideology, if not official ideology, the rise of Communism is the rise of the Spirit now. Marx borrowed the process of Communist ascent from Hegel's ideas on the rise of the Spirit in our times and from general Indo-European Christian culture. American business ideology is in the same mold, with a mix of racism and religious parochialism. In its view, American business comes from Northern European

Christians and only them. Capitalism, and only it, promotes Progress. Progress is the rise of the Spirit in our times.

The Spirit can make use of individual prominent people such as Napoleon or Darwin but really a rise of the Spirit is a social event. What counts are movements, cultures, art, religion, etc. not the particular passing people who are their instruments. This attitude leads to the stress on collectivism, herds, trends, “the next big thing”, and the social whole dominating the individual.

Along with the rise of Romanticism came the rise of capitalism and the ideology of the individual. At first, this seems like a contradiction but it is not. In fact, the ideology of capitalism does not stress individual much. It stresses individuals in service to business firms, labor unions, schools, socio-economic class, technology, enterprise, etc. Individuals are interesting for their contributions to these causes.

The stress on the individual comes through the Romantic storyline and the rebel. Rebels by definition are apart from the current obvious social form even if they are the vanguard of the next dominant social form. If the rebel really represents the next big thing, then to be a rebel is to fight for the Spirit and so to be sure of being a good guy. People like to see themselves as rebels even when they are solidly on the side of the dominant social group, as with business entrepreneurs and lawyers who recall law school.

Eventually the tension between the rebel and society has to be resolved. It is almost always resolved in favor of the social group. Steve Jobs spent his life inventing gadgets for the middle class no matter how cool the gadgets looked and worked and no matter how much the gadgets made the middle class feel it was distinct and in the vanguard. The resolution in favor of society is much like the end in “rom coms” where the bad boy has to grow up and learn responsibility. Also as in rom coms, rebels never quite give up believing they are staunch individuals but hang on to their rebel clothes and rebel manners well into old age. Hans Solo always keeps the blaster handy and ghetto gangsters carry their “9”. Every hipster rebel looks exactly like every other hipster rebel. Every hard guy and hard girl individualist has tattoos just like all the other individualists.

In Romanticism, the Spirit works through Creative Chaos. The old order is too much order while the new order, as it rises, seems like chaos to the old order. In democracy, the people are chaos but out of them arises order, justice, and prosperity. In economic dogma, the market is like chaos but out of it arises satisfaction for people who are willing to work or are clever, and general prosperity for all. The order arises not through anybody’s plan but simply out of interaction. These are all fine myths and are even partly true but they are not all true. Sometimes chaos is just chaos. Sometimes it is bad and supports other bad things. Not every revolution leads to the American Constitution. The revolutions in Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, and North Korea led to hell. Not every biker bar is a bastion of free souls who have interesting ideas. The free market sometimes leads to housing bubbles, collapses, and recession. Democracy sometimes supports bad leaders and bad ideas such as Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. Sometimes they are bad enough to drive a country to ruin.

Creativity is more than upwelling passion. It is not something that comes of its own unbidden and brings us goodness without further work. As Thomas Edison famously said, genius is 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration. We don’t do the ground work for true creativity and true advances unless we understand how much we need the groundwork and how hard it is both before and after the ideas.

Acting naturally can't save us. Art can't save us. Smart shopping can't save us. Entrepreneurs and business people can't save us. Charismatic spiritual rebels can't save us. Soldiers can't save us, not even if we call every soldier a hero. I want to keep science.

Different episodes of the Spirit each have value but they are also qualitatively distinct and one order cannot be assessed by the standards of another order. The order of machines and humans before Neo, while humans still had Zion, was valuable. The order after Neo will be valuable but different. The order of the Jedi before Sidious, Vader, and Luke had value but it is not the order after Luke defeats Sidious. The Middle Ages had value, and set the stage for modern democracy, but the two orders are qualitatively distinct.

We can look at each person as a manifestation of the Spirit. Thus each person has value, each person is distinct, and people are not comparable in the same way that a pound of apples is comparable to a pound of potatoes. Like people, ways of life are also valuable and qualitatively distinct. A movie star might make more money than a computer programmer but movie stars are not really better. Business is not necessarily a better way of life than teacher, or vice versa. So far, this way of looking is not so bad, and has had some good effects. Everybody likes to be a unique valuable individual and everybody wants the teacher to see his-her kids' particular abilities and needs.

Problems arise when we push it too far. What if everybody really is totally unique and not comparable? How do we make laws for everybody? How do we judge court cases? What if every way of life really is unique and not comparable? How do we decide if it is better to be a plumber or a brain surgeon, not for people in general but for us in particular? How do we decide how much to pay anybody? Taking it too far is what Romanticism naturally does. Taking it too far allows people to use the ideology to get what they want. Taking it too far leads naturally to feelings of entitlement.

Making everybody and every way of life strictly unique and not comparable has its funny sides. It leads to reality TV shows starring Paris Hilton and then to some really fun ads starring her. But funny reality shows are really just the happy tip of an otherwise bad iceberg. Romanticism resolves the individual-social dichotomy for the social so it seems it should pull people together. But, if people are really qualitatively distinct, and ways of life are qualitatively distinct, then people cannot be completely pulled together. Rather than draw similar people together in a common enterprise, Romanticism puts up an insurmountable wall. People become the gods of their own kingdoms but the kingdoms are sparsely populated and bleak.

People flit from way of life to way of life like the proverbial never-ending college students who goes from major to major (see the first "Librarian" movie). People wonder if another life would be better. The grass is always greener. Nobody is ever satisfied. Nobody knows how to be satisfied and nobody can know how to be satisfied. People who are dissatisfied with their own lives cannot see there is some satisfaction in the world even if they are not satisfied. They see only their own situation, which, inevitably, is a big chunk of dissatisfaction: "I Can't Get No Satisfaction", neither can anybody else, and so there cannot be any satisfaction. When everybody is unique and valuable, we can't assess in general. Where everybody has unique value, it is not that everybody has equal high value. Everybody has the same low value or non-value. People become chronically jealous. They cause problems for neighbors. They magnify their

sense of entitlement as a way to go after a satisfaction they can never reach. This is all the results of what philosophers used to call “solipsism” and what modern religious teachers bemoan as an excess of individualism and selfishness.

#### **(4) The Worst Damage.**

The worst damage done by Romanticism is to shape other ideas in its own image. It steals thoughts and so poisons them. All of the above cases are examples of Romanticism perverting otherwise good ideas from other frames of reference. Romanticism took its idea of the Spirit from the idea of God and its idea of the movement of the Spirit from Progress. It gets much of its force from the desire of people to build a better world as Jesus taught. We would be better off directly thinking about those ideas rather than the Romantic remake. We see everything in terms of the basic Romantic plot and characters. We miss other real and interesting kinds of people and storylines. Romanticism is bad relativism. It sees other thoughts only as lesser versions of itself and thus it denies their own distinct validity.

Romanticism extols creativity, passion, and life but really stifles them by discrediting creativity, passion, and life that don't serve it or fit its mold. Rather than see the simple beauty, awe, fearfulness, and truth of nature, we see all of nature now as the Spirit. Romanticism glamorizes nature and so takes away from the better bigger reality that nature is – in the same way that glamorizing women or young men takes away from the better that they really are. By glamorizing nature, Romanticism makes sure that we can't steward nature as we should.

Romanticism took away our ability to see true strength and weakness in America. Sometimes we need a small group of people to recall basic principles of humanity and American life, and return America to its principles – but if they see themselves in Romantic terms they will cause more harm than good and will divert us from the principles they seek to recover. Romanticism subverted true useful needed justifiable rebellion with silly glamorized ineffectual rebellion. It replaced social protest with hooliganism. It glamorized socio-economic class and so kept us from seeing the real basis for class and how to deal with problems of class. Not all chaos is creative; some chaos causes damage. The People are not simply the embodiment of Creative Chaos; they are less than and more than that. Non-White ethnic groups are not a purer form of Creative Chaos and so a purer form of the People. We need some Creative Chaos and some of it has to come from the people in general and from people outside the mainstream. We also need order and to suppress bad chaos. We won't get the right balance as long as we let Romanticism tell us what social life and social changes are all about. Romanticism put causing mischief in place of working for true better changes.

Romanticism allows people to avoid reality while rationalizing what they want. Romanticism blocks better understanding of the real world. It keeps us from doing what we need to do to make our world better. It wastes energy in acts that do no lasting good, and too often make things worse. It makes us vulnerable to ideological hucksters such as “rebel” conservatives and liberals who enable. Romanticism enables an indulgent self, enables self-serving, lets people pursue foolish mistaken codes while thinking they are true and noble, and allows people to do bad things in the service of ideologies.

Romanticism is well-suited to various groups of disaffected modern people that, at first glance, seem to have little in common. People do well when they spice up their lives with a little fantasy. Romanticism

takes advantage of normal human need by putting its own fantasies into people's minds. Bored people can pretend their lives are interesting by taking drugs and having mildly kinky sex and-or by working for a cause. Marginalized people who want "a piece of the pie" can blame "the man" or "the Liberals", and can avoid seeing their own fault in their own problems. People who wish to be free of a self they don't like can invent a heroic beautiful self that secretly swims in a deeper truer cosmic current. People who wish to be free of a society they don't like can condemn the obvious social system as an evil anti-spiritual gang even while they live in a wannabe imitation parody of what they condemn. Romanticism goes well with the "beautiful loser" flawed demon-haunted morally pure outsider who can't save society-as-a-whole but sacrifices to help particular people. Romanticism fueled both pop culture and fundamentalist religion. As much as any adolescent rebellion, Romanticism powered rock and roll. Romanticism helps rulers keep the people in line by giving potential trouble makers a bit of rebel ideology that makes no difference or that even indirectly supports the power structure. Romanticism is so mixed with modern ideas of bad boys, bad girls, and rebels that it is not possible to think of these people except in Romantic terms.

### **(5) Romanticism, Emotion, and Irrationality.**

People who like the Enlightenment with its ideal of Reason, such as me, also complain that modern life suffers from a mass indulgent return to emotion, superstition, simplistic religion, and habits that come of emotion such as buying stuff and trendiness. Much as it would be easy to blame any unhappiness of life by faulting emotion, that assessment is not true. Only a few people in the Enlightenment really pursued Reason vigorously. Most people were content to act like normal human beings and to use the findings of Enlightenment Reason when it suited them in our own lives. Even Isaac Newton was far from rational in the sense we wrongly see in Mr. Spock or Dr. Sheldon Cooper.

We don't have any dogmas and institutions that we really trust to serve as the Light and Reason of our lives. If people could still trust well-thought-out religion such as formal Christianity or Buddhism, then people would seem reasonable even if they were not more reasonable than average or than people in other religions. If modern institutions were really well thought out, and people really trusted populist democracy, simplistic capitalism, mass education, and formal religion, then people would seem more reasonable even though really they would only be more trusting.

Modern people don't trust their institutions. Our institutions are not as well thought out as we would hope, not even when we had really good thinkers such as Franklin, Jefferson, and Madison to start them for us. Without a foundation in reasonable institutions, people have to turn to emotion and their emotion is more obvious. If you don't trust democracy or capitalism, turn to religion and spiritualism, or, better yet, forge an alliance between religion and capitalism or spiritualism and populist democracy. To an outsider, your acts seem irrational, but they are not flagrantly irrational, or at least not much more than for most people in most situations in human history.

Which brings us back to Reason versus Passion and the role of Passion in Romanticism. Passion is above Reason in Romanticism. Passion is the way to the truth and the Spirit. There are few other ways, and none better for most people. We get lost when we don't trust our Passion, that is, when we don't indulge our Passion. Romanticism enables indulgence in emotion.

But Romanticism does not alone by itself cause indulgence in emotion and rejection of reason. People are always about the same mix of reason and emotion and emotion almost always leads the mix. Faith in Jesus and faith in the Buddha are emotions even when highly rationalized. Sometimes conditions mixed with the right stance lead reason to be more stressed than usual, as in the Enlightenment, but that usually doesn't last long. Sometimes conditions allow the right stance to stress emotions as modern times do with Romanticism. Then it seems the stance caused emotional indulgence to explode but that is not so. We need a correct view because we don't want to mistakenly think that debunking Romanticism will alone lead people to adopt reason. The correct hope is that we can lead people to put their emotions behind good causes and not put them behind bad causes, and that we can allow some unusually level-headed people to find their good mix of reason and emotion.

If the baseline modern conditions stayed the same, I am sure people would find another ideology like Romanticism to take the place of Romanticism. It might even be Romanticism with another name. It might be Mahayana Buddhism or Hinduism.

If people could get rid of Romanticism, think out their institutions, and adopt well thought out institutions, then we could say they were more rational in our times than in other times. We could even call it the Enlightenment returning. That is not likely to happen.

When people can't rely on the rationality of their institutions, and turn to emotion as a result, usually they don't go overboard but sometimes they do go overboard. That is when we get the profound irrationality that makes trouble. We get Communism, Fascism, Jonestown type cults, psycho-babble, Republican spiritualism, knee-jerk patriotism, Muslim terrorism, etc. That is what we see in the news. When that is what we see, we think we live in times besotted by irrational emotion and nothing else. Because our times are not guided by reasonable well thought out institutions, we do live in times guided by emotions but probably not too much more than in other periods of confusion in human history. We are distinct because we live in times in which emotion and Romanticism have allied. I don't know if there were other times of confusion in which emotion allied with a dogma like Romanticism to produce times like our times. I could guess, and I hope other smart people do guess, but here is not the place.

## **(6) Saving Science.**

One aspect of the return to emotional irrationality deserves attention because it does a lot of harm and we can't afford to put up with it anymore: denigration of science and abandonment of science. I include math and logic in science. When I was in school, most "social scientists" did not include social science as science; but I did; I leave it up to you. I was shocked and dismayed by the bad attitude of Americans in general, and academics in particular, to science after about 1970. I know what bad patronizing attitudes scientists can take, and I know how politicians and business people have misused science, but none of that justifies the stupid irrational "dumping on" science after 1970. To understand, it helps to listen to an album by an old comedy group called "Fire Sign Theater". They narrated a day at "More Science High School" so they could criticize the 1950s stress on simplistic technological fixes and the thinking that goes along with it. Their problem is they throw out the baby with the bathwater. Their solution is typical of the 1970s and Romanticism: better personal relations and relations with the Spirit.

Science has never been fully accepted by “the masses”. They tolerate it because it brings improvement to their lives. Contrary to the fear of scientists, the masses are not against science any more than they are necessarily against anything else they can’t understand. Science is magic done by magicians. As long as it doesn’t come too fast, and it is white magic, it is fine. Nerds are lovable now. But after about 1955, science did come too fast and changes were too deep. For example, advances in science allowed both safe abortion and allowed protecting fetuses, and so underlay the abortion issue. Fast deep change was how we got into Romanticism to begin with and it tends to bring bad resurgences.

In the 1950s, people began to use science as the scapegoat for the ills of modern life, as some people use emotion as the scapegoat, and some religious people use selfishness, materialism, and trendiness. Science is rational, emotion is better than rationality, so we have to promote emotion over rationality, have to oppose rationality when it opposes emotion, and so we have to oppose science.

Regardless of whether you put any stock in that line of reasoning (!), we can’t afford the attitude. First, we have dug ourselves into a deep hole. We have hurt nature badly. A simple dose of science won’t fix the problem but we can’t know the problem well enough to fix it without big doses of science. We need research, and need to believe it. To apply science in big doses, we need the right attitude, which means we need to change our attitude from what it is now. We cannot afford idiots who deny global climate change. Second, the world economy is now based on competition between nations and between big business firms. Recall that there has been, and will be, a clear relation between investment in science and later economic gain. (This relation is not true among little nations and small firms but the exception doesn’t matter.) Ironically, the more the investment is done in “pure” science that does not pay attention to immediate gains, the bigger the eventual gains. The more investment is done with immediate gains in mind, as with Reagan-ism, the less the eventual gains. To do pure science with little thought for eventual gains, we cannot hate science or rationality. We have to trust, value, enjoy, and promote pure science. For that, we cannot simply oppose reason to emotion and take the side of emotion or reason.

I doubt people could have “dumped on” science after about 1970 if we were not living in Romanticism. Romanticism certainly enabled dumping on science. But, after the 1970s, supposedly rational business people also tried to denigrate science in the issue of global climate change when science got in the way of profits. We have had Romanticism since about 1800 yet people did not hate science until after about 1970. So Romanticism helped but it is not the only reason why people dumped on science. How we can live in an emotional Romantic world and still value science, I do not speculate on here.

## 08 Decent and Indecent People

Lucy Brown from "Peanuts": "I love humanity, its people I hate".

This chapter defends decent people and attacks the glamorizing of indecent people. It does not support a return to prudery. It supports a natural non-dogmatic sense of decency. Decency is not the property of the Left or Right. Both the Left and Right extol their versions of indecent people while denigrating simple decent people. This mistake hurts everyone in general and hurts particular groups such as ethnic groups. Do not confuse my idea of "decent" with the Christian-Muslim "saved" or Hindu-Buddhist "enlightened", and do not confuse "indecent" with "damned" or "unenlightened". Indecent people are "lost".

In his novel "Darkness at Noon", about a disgraced Soviet official, Arthur Koestler looks at decency and indecency. He sees that indecency makes us demonic and makes the world hell. Adopting any dogma uncritically is a broad road to indecency. The author Charles "Bucky" Bukowski believed the dogma that goodness hides below a scruffy surface while outer politeness means inner badness, so he staggered through a long quest to find decency in broken characters, naughtiness, bad decisions, drink, sex, and the underbelly of society. He did write well. The movie "Bar Fly" is roughly about him. Most detective fiction is about outsiders who are superficially indecent but inwardly deeply decent; they work in an immoral world cursed with big secrets; in it, hypocritical superficially upright people are all really indecent. The singer Jimmy Cliff went from romanticizing bad boys to appreciating simple decency. Listen to "The Harder They Come" and compare to later work. At first, the character "Rudy" seems like a kick-ass "stick it to the man" hero until we see that Rudy does more harm than good. Listen to the 1970s post-Ska band "The Specials" for a satire of stereotypes and for appreciation of the decent man Nelson Mandela. In their own silly ways, the movies "Enchanted" and "Clueless" are about the right mix of simple decency with reality. The movie "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" is a prayer for the triumph of decency.

### Is and Is Not.

Decency is not prudery, prissiness, slavishly following arbitrary conventions, and being shocked by even a small misstep. Decency does not defend hurtful hypocrisy and hurtful social conventions. Decency is not the same as defending social order against all enemies. Indecency is not the same as freedom, honesty, getting in touch with deep Life, seeing through bad hurtful conventions, and struggling for justice in an unjust world.

I do not want to return to prudery. I dislike prudery. Not much has changed since the so-called prudish 1950s except we elevated some former "low life" types into dogmatic chicness. I am not a grumpy old man who sees the world "going to hell in a hand basket". I try to look at facts without dogma blinders.

I know all this already: We all have a little badness and naughtiness, and that can be a good thing. We need both good Kirk and bad Kirk and both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. "To make an omelet, you have to break some eggs". The poor fight the rich through small acts that seem like indecency. Some rebellion is justified due to unfairness and to the demise of nature; this rebellion can seem indecent; and indecent people use it to justify themselves. Social powers use the idea of decency for control, so sometimes we

have to scuttle simplistic ideas of decency to get free. The American revolutionaries were rebel “bad boys”. Rule breaking, naughtiness, and badness have roles in art. Sometimes we need tough people to fight bad people. We need strong emotions, they can be useful, and strong emotions cannot always be good. Intoxication can be fun and useful. At times, you have to be cruel to be kind. The Golden Rule is not all sweetness. Indecency can be like creative irrationality. Fun is good in itself. The world is boring much of the time. Decency can be boring. A bit of naughtiness or badness can alleviate boredom for a while.

I am not against “all this”. I don’t want to put “all this” under another layer of prudery and hypocrisy. But we can’t live by inversions and half-truths. In this case, half-truths are lies worse than lies. We go too far the other way. We indulge. We glamorize indecency to cover our frustration and justify our indulgence. We enable indecency and indecent people. We denigrate decency.

We romanticize indecency because we don’t know what else better to do. We have no good ideas about how to run a society and save nature. We don’t see how decency can point down a better path, and we don’t see how to fight our way down the better path using energy from decency alone. If you can’t make the world better through decency, you can have fun with naughtiness, denigrate simple decency, and find rationalizations for your indecency.

I am sorry we can’t save the world with simple decency but that is still not an excuse to enable indecency and hurt decency. We can do better. We can blend decency, social order, personal expression, social critique, rebellion, and activism better.

The obvious answer is to be your self and respect decency, unless your self is an indecent asshole or a criminal. If it were that simple, I would not have to write. We need to look at what is indecent and decent, and then practice doing what we should have been able to do naturally in the first place, until we can do it as if it were natural.

I urge people to be as simply decent as they can with as little reliance on dogma as possible. Don’t try to be perfect. Don’t look down on simple decent people. Don’t romanticize, imitate, enable, or tolerate indecent people and indecent groups. Don’t try to prove yourself to glamorized chic indecent people. Be brave enough to be simply decent as best you can. Use your energy to understand real problems and work on them. If you do that, you don’t have to worry about making a few mistakes, you will do good, you will feel good, and, sometimes, accidentally you will be naturally decent.

### **Game Plan.**

I focus on: (A) simple decent people; (B) passably decent normal common people; (C1) indecent people who are indecent by nature; (C2) indecent people who make indecency a stance by invoking excuses of social injustice and a hard life; and (C3) indecent people who milk the system while looking polite. I do not dwell on C3 because space prohibits and because they do not affect daily life as much as C1 and C2. I do not dwell on fake prudish hyper-decent people because we already see through them. I overlook some egregious indecency such as sexual harassment and crime.

When I told this story simply before, people took the story to extol themselves as truly decent people and to condemn their un-friends as immorally indecent or as prudish-hyper-decent-moral-fake indecent. We are doubly good; they are doubly bad. So I now tell a longer story and give some history. The chapter comes in three parts. Part One is the main message. It stands alone. Part Two is historical and mythical background. Part Three is examples. You should read Part One. You can skip, or read, Parts Two and Three as you will.

### **The Ideology (Dogma) of Indecency.**

Part Two explains the Ideology of Indecency but it helps to have a synopsis here. Americans think of rebels as the vanguard of truth and social justice, as the force of creative chaos now in our world. Rebels are Life. We think of all established order as hyper-prudish hypocritical stultifying Death, and as working to maintain unjust power and wealth. The common people are the unwitting dupes of power, wealth, and Death. We wrongly put decency on the side of Death. Life seems indecent outside but is decent inside no matter how indecent it seems outside. Death seems decent outside but really is indecent inside. The more indecent you seem outside, the more decent you are inside. The more decent you seem outside, the more indecent you are inside. To make yourself decent inside, act indecently outside. The more indecently you act outside, the more decent you are inside. To be a really good decent person inside, you have to be a rebel and externally indecent. Externally indecent people embody all the good traits that we really need, and only they do.

This is all dogma. While this dogma seems like mere extended teen rebellion, it is more than that. Now it is a widespread stance in American culture; a system of values; of presenting yourself in everyday social life; of what we expect of other people; and of how we assess people.

Most of this dogma is half-right, so mostly wrong. The dogma would be mostly harmless, and sometimes do some good, except that indecent people have seized on it as a tool. Indecent people fool otherwise moderately decent people because we are susceptible to bad dogma. So the dogma of indecency is bad. I don't explain why we are susceptible to bad dogma.

Indecent people use the dogma of indecency and use guilt about social injustice to act out, get legitimacy, get stuff, benefits, power, protection, and state programs, and avoid punishment. They claim they are deeply decent inside by being indecent outside through clothes, music, art, and behavior. They add fear when guilt and legitimacy alone are not enough. We wrongly think obnoxious indecent people have a right to act that way because they might have been the victims of social injustice (C1) or might have had a hard life (C3). Indecent people put on the face of rebels advancing Life, creative chaos, and art, so as to cover their own deep indecency. They use bad dogma, guilt, and fear to cover being indecent. Normal people "buy" this excuse and accept being taken.

Some indecent people are adept at milking the system while looking good such as some professionals, business people, politicians, religious leaders, and activists (C3). These people are genuinely indecent but this chapter is not much concerned with them.

Before about 1980, using dogma to cover indecency was a tactic mostly of the Left and of ethnic, gender, and religious groups associated with the Left. Since 1980, the Right has vigorously adopted this strategy.

Now we get fantasies of dominant stultifying Death-dealing Leftist Socialist hegemony, Conservative Rebels, and thuggish louts of the Right. We get dogma of the free market as the creative chaos of Life and of business people as the creative rebels of the market.

In reality, usually what you see is what you get. The large majority of people who seem indecent outside really are indecent inside too. You are not more decent inside because you put on a pose of indecency, rebel, tough guy who sees through the bullshit, or artist. The big majority of indecent people of Left and Right are simply loutish, inconsiderate, rude, loud, dirty, pushy, greedy, irresponsible, and liars. They are agents of Death. They are not creative chaos, not fun, and do not aid social justice. We excuse and thus enable indecent people. We have to stop letting guilt lead us to enable indecent people of either the Left or Right. To enable indecent people stands in the way of real social justice and real Life.

## **PART 1: DECENT AND INDECENT PEOPLE**

### **(A) Decent People.**

Decency is good. Decency is not a mistake or a mask for something sinister. Decency is not prudery. Decency is not social rigidity and Death. Decency is a big source of Life. Decency is nothing to be ashamed of.

There is no point in giving examples of decent people. A reader would not know the people in my life who are simply decent, and it would take too long to give their account. I do not know personally any public figures, so I have nobody in common with readers that I can be sure is simply decent. Think back on your own life to recall simply decent people. I cannot get across the feel for simple decent people by writing more. If you can develop a feel for them, that feel is the best guide for this chapter.

True simple naturally decent people see persons in all people and life in all animals. They value people, dignity, and nature. They are considerate by habit and on purpose. They follow the Golden Rule and “applies equally”. They see when a little gain for themselves causes a greater loss to the community, and forego their gain. They see when a little loss to themselves might cause greater gain to the community, and willingly take the loss. They don’t try to get away with much. They don’t think they are above rules. When they have to break rules, they expect to take the punishment. They have fun. They understand working hard to make the world better, and see that people with ability should use their ability. They do what they can. Decent people live by simple decency in the same way that a real soldier lives by honor without making a big deal of it. Decent people often are interesting. Simple decent people are a small minority.

Decent people are not superficial hypocritical moralists. Decent people see when bad acts cause hurt but decent people act more to help than to condemn. They don’t like immoral or indecent behavior but they aim their reaction more toward the effects rather than the instigator. They assess acts morally but, rather than condemn, they lead people to see the practical value or harm. Decent people are not judgmental, they just judge and they are just decent. They do not make a point of their own decency; often enough, they don’t even know they are decent. They lead by example.

Decent people usually are not too assertive but they are not wimps. Most decent people are tough both physically and mentally. They can “take it”. They have to be tough to be decent and still survive.

Some simple decent people are boring like plain applesauce, housewives in a 1950s sitcom, or a cartoon character – but few. Most decent people are like everybody else. They have ups and downs, foibles, temper fits, interests, passions, and stupidities. For a while, they can be fooled by ideologies. They do not have a direct line to God or the one true theology. The difference is that, when fooled, simple decent people revert back into decency as the default. They always return to decency, usually quickly. They have a center, the center holds, and they go back to the center naturally, gracefully, and without pretense. They might take a mulligan on a golf course but they don’t embezzle. They might drink too much at a party but they don’t persistently chase a neighbor’s spouse. They might gossip briefly but they don’t slander, and they make sure the truth is out there.

I have met simple decent people everywhere in every religion. They are among the best people in the world and are a jewel of God’s creation. The best people I have ever met were decent people working hard to make a better world. Many decent people are simple believers in their traditional faith. Not all are religious. None are perfect. They are more interesting than average. Some are fascinating.

Simple decent people, and simple decency, can be ruined by bad dogma, bad society, bad upbringing, and bad laws. I wish this were not so, that God had made decency was impervious, but it is so. To hurt simple decent people and simple decency is one of the greatest crimes that can be done. The strangling of simple decency is one of the greatest tragedies of modern life.

### **(B) Normal Common Passably Decent People.**

Most people are normal-common-passably decent. Normal people see decency, and usually follow it, but they don’t live by it in the sense that a real soldier lives by honor. Mostly, passable people are decent because it is easy enough and because human nature, including their own, overall is more moral than immoral. Those are good reasons. Passable people behave well enough to get along most of the time. They don’t like to let go of gains, they rationalize too much, try to get away with stuff sometimes but don’t make getting away with stuff a way of life, are lax about working hard to make a better world, but get the idea and do little bits for it now and again. They use their abilities for their own advantage rather than to make the world better. They understand rules, such as “do not cheat”, and know the common good, such as parks, clean air, and quiet; but they are easily tempted to break rules, and easily tempted to use up the common good.

Some people on the good end of normal feel the duty to defend decency, like the soldiers in the movie “A Few Good Men” or “Saving Private Ryan”. People on the good end of normal understand working hard to make a better world, and understand using their particular talents wisely. I cannot say if accepting these ideals moves a normal person into the category “simply decent” – I doubt it -- but accepting these ideals does make him-her special beyond other common people. Sometimes common people do extraordinary things, such as give a kidney or pull a dog out of a burning car, but that is not how they run daily life. I cannot say if doing some big extraordinary act makes you special but I doubt that too. It is still something to be proud of and happy about.

We cannot make ourselves into simple decent people. I am not a simple decent person. I am only normal partly decent passable. The best we can do is work hard to rise up to the good end of normal, help simple decent people, help decency everywhere in everyone, work to make the world better, not stupidly glamorize indecency, and fight indecency when it threatens good people and good society. That is a lot, more than enough for most of us. This chapter aims to help in that goal.

Normal common passably decent people need principles but they also need dogma, and therein arises a big part of the trouble. We are susceptible to stupid ideas such as chic indecency, Rebel Conservative, Postmodern Irony, bi-polar politics, voodoo economics, and nasty religion. Even smart normal common passable people, professionals and business people, are susceptible. That is part of real evolved human nature.

Normal people fear they will be taken for an insipid un-chic old-fashioned decent person, so they avoid appearing as a half-way decent person. They over-compensate. They value being chic and being clever above decency, and so pretend to be worldly wise. They need to imitate indecent people so they are not branded with the stigma of traditional prudery and so they can participate in the cool of naughtiness. Most people who think they are a little indecent, a little naughty, a little “bad boy” or “bad girl”, really are normal common passable people acting out for a while, as in the movie “Hall Pass”. All this is too bad not because it is bad but because it so silly. Their lives would be easier if they knew better.

When common people want to have some fun, they turn to naughtiness like booze, drugs, sex, cars and clothes. Common people (used to) feel they need an excuse to have fun, and feeling a bit naughty and indecent is the excuse. There is nothing too wrong with all this except, to excuse fun and naughtiness, common people buy into the dogma of indecency. Naughtiness is their way of being Alive. Life excuses fun, naughtiness, and indecency. When common people see the implications of their naughtiness for supporting the dogma of indecency, rather than back off, re-assess, and find better reasons for fun and even for naughtiness, they double down. “We are alive because we are naughty and we are naughty because we are alive.” They are trapped. To not feel trapped, they excuse and enable indecent people. “If they can do it, then so can I; if I can do it, so can they; and if I feel right about doing it, so can they.” Indecent people seize the opening, and we are off.

Common people need to feel justified. Rather than dig in, research issues, fight for good causes, and volunteer to help needy people, common people would rather be naughty rebels. Even if they do adopt a cause, they want a cause that helps them be naughty rebels. There is not much wrong with that stance except it leaves them ignorant about how the world really works, leaves good work undone, and leads common people to buy the dogma of indecency. Again, rather than back off and re-assess, they double down. They are trapped. To feel less trapped, they excuse and enable indecent people. “If I am a bit indecent as part of rebellion against injustice, then the indecency of indecent people also must be rebellion against injustice; if their indecency is rebellion against injustice, then my naughty rebellion must be against injustice too, and so justified.” Again, indecent people seize the opening.

I love fun, naughtiness, and a little rebellion. I wish I could buy nice clothes and a nice house. If I were young, I would chase some crazy women for a while. Sometimes I have worked on causes that made me feel good as a rebel. But none of this is any reason to excuse and enable real indecency. Stop thinking of indecency as chic rebellion and chic justification. You don't need an excuse to have fun. If you want to

get stoned, get stoned. If you want to feel justified, do your homework. If you want to help yourself and other people, give up seeking justification and simply act decently.

Even though normal common passable people are susceptible to bad dogma, they also usually shuck it off eventually. They don't live according to bad dogma for too long. Unless bad dogma gives them a big consistent edge in daily competition with neighbors, normal common passable usually end up paying only lip service to bad dogma while acting passably decent and being all-around good neighbors, as Roman Catholics and Muslims have adopted birth control and abortion despite formal teaching. Normal common passably decent people usually don't want to kill people of the wrong religion, race, or class for very long. Sometime in their twenties, they give up wanting to be a kick-ass biker or the glamorous star of their own reality show. They fall back into normal common passable decency eventually.

By falling back into normal common passable decency, normal people are an insurance policy for overall decency. They get us back to passable decency even if they don't get us back to simple natural decency. If, like me, you are a common passable person, don't get a big ego over the fact that your tendency to go back to happy ignorance saves the world from some grief. I don't know if God planned it this way.

Even the limited extent and limited time that normal common passably decent people support the dogma of indecency is enough to keep the dogma going. It is enough to keep the cycle of self-delusion going. It is enough so children pick up the bad dogma from their parents. It is enough to enable indecency and indecent people. Because we don't have a good acceptable alternative to the dogma of indecency, this is likely to be the case for the foreseeable future.

Normal common passable people help make the world interesting. They are not the only source of fun in the world but they are a big source. That idea is behind movies like "The Goonies", "The 'Burbs", "E.T.", "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids", "Meet the Parents", "Couples' Retreat", and "Knocked Up". Normal common passably decent people do not usually interfere with other sources of interest such as pop culture, art, politics, science, and nature. Often they support them. If the world consisted entirely of normal common passably decent people it would be interesting enough but not as interesting as a world that had simple naturally decent people too. If we add indecent people, the world might be more interesting at times, but the added thrill is not often worth the pain.

### **(C) Indecent People in General.**

Simply put, indecent people are the opposite of decent people. Indecent people are selfish, annoying, rude, immoral, obscene, tasteless, loud, louts, inconsiderate except when they are considerate to serve their own selfish ends, and make the world dirty. They are thugs, bullies, and "orcs". Usually they are only aggravating minor thugs but sometimes they make it to the level of dangerous thugs. Indecency is not creative benevolent chaos. Indecency causes bad chaos. Goodness does not often come because of indecency but despite indecency. Indecency is almost always bad.

There are many kinds of indecency and indecent people. This chapter looks at only three.

This chapter does not describe people who are indecent through prudery, that is, through feigned hyper-decency, such as moralistic churchy people. This chapter does not describe the indecency that comes

from “political correctness” (PC) of either the Left or Right. This chapter does not describe the indecency of power and wealth; you can go to the Tanakh and New Testament for that. Politics and religion abound in indecency; there is no use dwelling on it. I skip obvious criminals. Sexual harassment is indecent; I can only mention it. I don’t care about people of all genders who act slutty. Sluttiness is more symptom than cause, and is more an offense to taste than to decency; I find it silly. I don’t write about people who seduce a neighbor’s spouse. I don’t write about people who are harsh only to themselves or to other consenting adults but cause no harm in general. Nobody is hurt by the local drunk except the drunk, as on the old Andy Griffith Show; nobody is hurt by a “Goth” who extends the act into his-her twenties; and nobody is hurt by the neighbor’s kinky boots. I know people are hurt by drugs, including alcohol, and by violence, and that the hurting is often indecent, but I don’t go into it here.

The first kind of indecent people are indecent by habit or natural character. They are rude, loutish, and make bad neighbors.

The second kind of indecent people make indecency a stance. They get satisfaction from it. They use dogma as a cover for indecency. The most common covers are “rebellion as social critique” and “I have a hard life that makes me angry, lash out, and take”.

The third kind of indecent people are adept at politely milking the system. The tactic of politely milking the system is a big topic, so I mention these indecent people only briefly.

The three kinds of indecent people overlap. People who have a tendency toward indecency are good at using dogmas as tools. Thugs with an excuse, type two, make bad neighbors. Thugs with an excuse use their abilities to milk the system. Anybody who milks the system for long takes on the character of a thug even if he-she is polite on the outside. I don’t sort out the overlap.

Indecent people don’t see persons in people, don’t see life in animals, and don’t care about public good. They never sacrifice their gain for public good. They know that rules lead to greater good for everybody, and, indirectly, for themselves, but they don’t care. They are above rules except when they get caught. They are special and can do what they want.

Maybe the best short way to say it is that indecency is a kind of rude selfish betrayal. It betrays what we could be as people. It betrays our duty to self, others, society, and nature. It betrays how we should feel about people in general, people who need our help, and people who cannot fend entirely for themselves. It betrays the rules, values, and institutions that we set up to realize our best goals.

Loutish behavior betrays what it means to be simply human. Using the dogma of indecency betrays true ideas about chaos, society, creativity, life, and death. Using dogma as a tool betrays the ideas that lie behind the dogma and that intend to help everybody such as freedoms, rights, and responsibilities. Using dogma as a tool prevents people from looking at real problems such as unemployment and race. The people who deal in ideas do the same as people who use dogma but they push actions off onto other people so the people who deal in ideas don’t have to feel directly guilty. Half-truths are big lies, lies are bad, and lies are bad in an indecent way. The system should work for us, and especially it should work for people who don’t have their own power and wealth. People who milk the system for themselves destroy the idea that institutions work for us. They betray the idea that institutions guard and embody our

values. They betray democracy, the church including non-Christian churches, schools, charities, and communities.

We should not fool ourselves. Indecent people are bad even when we can see their underlying humanity, their common bonds to other people and nature, their good points, and that they are useful in some ways. At some point, you are what you do. When we can, we should expose and resist them. If we can, we should get the authorities to help us control them. We should never excuse or enable them.

**(C1) Indecent: Bad Character.**

In daily life, the first group of indecent people usually causes the most harm. Bad neighbors, people who trash the local park, stay up late blasting an action movie, let their dog shit on your lawn or the apartment lawn, tell lies easily, dent your car, throw trash, cause havoc at the public pool, dress like cheap hookers of any gender, scare old people at the mall, jump lines, people who cause you grief so they can indulge the full extent of their tiny official power as bureaucrats, threaten to “get all up in your face”, and who pick fights, are all truly indecent and cause grief. Most people who are indecent by character think they are normal common passably decent people but they are not. They are indecent.

I wish I could get across how obnoxious and painful these people are but I can't. I am sorry most of us have had enough experience with them so I don't have to. I am sorry most of us, me too, are one of them sometimes. I am happy most of us are not like this by habit or character. Because most of us are not like this, we don't have to feel guilty about disliking these people and about not putting up with them.

You cannot easily change their character but you can limit the damage. When you can, call them out. Shaming them won't do much good but calling them out will get across to bystanders that there really is decency and indecency, and it matters. Don't act like a prude but simply speak from the decency in your heart. Don't call them out if you are afraid. When you can, get authorities to pass rules and get them to actually enforce the rules.

**(C2) Indecent: Always an Excuse.**

The second group of indecent people is thugs with an excuse. They use dogma to excuse themselves, manipulate others, and get others to enable them. These people do all the same indecent things as the first group, and more, but they have an excuse. Usually their indecency is obvious through bad manners and dress but not always. Even when they are polite on the surface, middle class, professional, or go to church on Sunday with their mommas, they are thugs with an excuse. This indecency has no particular political affiliation and comes out of no particular ethnic group. But, from about 1900 until now, most of these indecent people used ideas of the Left as the basis for their excuses, and we are more familiar with these people and that stance. After about 1980, they used ideas of the Right. These people sometimes act criminally. I don't talk about criminality, so think of your own examples.

The two biggest excuses are (A) social injustice and (B) hard life. As with the Soviet officials in Koestler's novel, these turn into dogmas that make people demonic. Any excuse will do. The real reasons these people are indecent is they “get off” on it and it gets them rewards. Usually the two excuses of “social injustice” and “hard life” go together. To paraphrase “West Side Story” they are “depraved on account of

they are deprived". If you "get off" on being indecent, it is easy to find some excuse, and the two excuses above are accepted by society. Indecent people with an excuse don't really get the ideas behind social criticism but they learn quickly that they can use the ideas to manipulate, so they learn the right phrases and the right people to go to. They know their rights and they know everyone else's responsibilities but they know nothing of the rights of other people or of their own responsibilities.

### **(C2A) Indecent: Social Injustice**

The particular social injustice includes all the standard discriminations: age, gender, religion, ethnicity, economic, social class, geographic origin, etc. The indecency is similar despite the particular claim and the group using the claim so I don't point out how a particular bias affects the kind of indecency common in any particular group.

The stance based on social injustice leans heavily on "us and them". There are versions for people who think of themselves as on the bottom or the top. The two versions hardly differ except for who is in the group. I present the bottom version because it is the one that most Americans likely face and because the top version has been massively discredited for decades, in art and in the media, as the excuse of snotty fascist rich people. Even so, the top version is not dead, and people who milk the system while looking good (C3 below), and Rebel Conservatives, use it. I leave it to you to make up the top version with proper substitutions. The bottom version goes like this:

"Society is corrupt. We are victims of society. Really we are big benefactors of society behind the scenes because we work hard to clear the land, make it safe, build railroads, build cities, create art, tend the sick and old, make jobs for the poor; hold families together; give sexual and emotional gratification; run shops; run small business; we do all the shit hard work such as care for the old in homes and run offices; but we get no recognition or reward. We get paid less than we are worth. We have little security. We have no recognition for anything. We are cheated. Everyone else benefits from what we do but we do not benefit from what we do or from what they do either. We are the banished in Babylon.

The basic situation is "us the victims" versus "them the oppressors". We are the outsiders and so we are the righteous rebels seeking justice, social justice, good social order, and LIFE. We are the people that God really loves. We have God's grace inside. We know how to enjoy life and have fun as God wished. They are the dry, dead, unjust oppressors.

As victims of injustice, we cannot be biased in terms of race, gender, age, religion, etc. We see clearly what is going on. We are more than fair to others. ALL other groups are TOTALLY biased and never see clearly. All other groups, and everyone in them, is always unfair.

Advances in society come only out of creative chaos. Life comes only out of creative chaos. We often act disorderly, true, but we are the chaos that brings advances and goodness. We are the vanguard of Life. We are the only people who are the true vanguard of Life. We are Life. Whatever opposes us is hyper-rigid, hyper-decent, prudish, and Death.

All other groups, and all the people in other groups, disrespect us, secretly or openly. Half of what they say is open disrespect and the other half is secret disrespect. They disrespect us as persons and as

members of our group. They disrespect what we do, say, our music, cars, fun, etc. The only reason they don't openly disrespect us all the time is that they are afraid of us.

So, we have a right to an attitude. We have a right to be "bad ass". We can (may) do what other people may not do. We can get back at oppressors in any way by any means. We are entitled to act out and to take advantage. We are entitled. We may take. We should take. We deserve it all. We deserve. The only reason we don't have what we deserve is because other groups unfairly stops us – Jews, Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, elitist intellectuals, socialist politicians, or big business. They are getting more than their share so we deserve what they have.

If we wish anything, including material good such as a TV or a service such as concerts in the street, then we have a right to that thing, and other people have a responsibility to give it to us. We have no duties to do anything for any other group. They cannot expect anything from us.

Half of what any person in our own group tells us is hand-me-down-lies from the people in power. All of what any person in any other group says is a trick to boss us around and keep us down. We can't listen to what others say. We can't listen to ideas about how the economy, society, or the world works unless those ideas get us what we want. Those ideas are all lies to talk us out of what we deserve. Ideas are lies. We have to trust our feelings. We have to trust our feelings of being screwed and needing to get back.

We are not like other groups and they are not like us. We can know them enough but they can't know us at all. We have our culture and ways. We have our "thing". We have our walk, talk, clothes, places, hair, and tats; they all show the power that we saved out of our oppression. We are entitled to our ways even if our ways are at odds with the mainstream of our own ethnic, gender, religious, or political group. You can't impose your standards of sexism, racism, religious bias, or any other bias.

All groups have art that lets them express what it means to be human. But their art is limited by their bias and their need to protect vested interests. It is fake art, outmoded art, like seventy-year old people who still worship Elvis. Our art is the real expression of what it means to be human in our times for real living people like us. Even if our art seems obnoxious, startling, and loud, it is the true art. We have a right to our art no matter how offensive at any time and any place. Other people do not have a right to their art within our area. The same is true of our fun and their fun.

All other groups are prejudiced against us but we see reality clearly, see the other groups clearly, and see ourselves clearly. What looks like prejudice against others by us is our right response to the reality forced on us. We cannot be prejudiced.

We make other people feel guilt and fear so other people will enable us, excuse us, give us benefits, give us things, and do things for us. We know how to scare other people. Scaring other people is fun and it makes them do what we want. We carry a big chip on our shoulder. We make sure nobody else, in our group or out, disrespects us ("disses us"). We take half of what everybody says as insult. We use what people say as an excuse to get them as in the movies "Cab Driver" and "Goodfellas".

Any attempt to shape what we do is really an attempt to dominate us even when other people cite public peace, order, decency, or the ultimate benefit of our group. We have a right to fight back and do what we want. We go against whatever other people tell us just because they tell us.”

Some specific acts these indecent people do are: They wear their pants with their butts hanging out. They wear skirts with half their butt crack showing. They wear clothes that are half-gangster but not gangster enough to there is no question or so they will get roused by the cops. They blast loud non-music out of cars. They blast loud movies out of home brain-death entertainment systems. They throw cans, bottles, wrappers, boxes, and trash around. They “trash” on purpose. They do not clean up after using public parks and pools. They take as much as they can get at public events such as civic dinners, company parties, picnics, and distributions of school supplies even when they are employed and have a good salary. They drink too much, drink in public, use drugs too much, and use the wrong drugs. They race cars and motorcycles on the streets. They date rape and just plain rape. The men coerce women into sex even if it is not out-and-out rape. The men impregnate women without caring about the baby. The girls get knocked up at age fifteen for a lot of bad reasons that I don’t go into here. Both men and women beat up women to control women. The men don’t take care of their children. They threaten people when people don’t look scared enough. They bully people at work and in public places. They mug people. They steal. They get in fights with their friends. They get in fights period. They fight dogs and cocks. They torture dogs. They beat up queers (“gay bashing”) or “hippies” or “yuppies”. They get in fights with people from other ethnic, religious, or gender groups. They ruin the scene at bars and clubs. They carry guns and get in shootouts at bars and clubs. They shoot people in parking lots. They gang up on people. They gang up on people to beat them up. They extort money from small businesses and from vulnerable people such as vendors, prostitutes, and strippers. They are gangster wannabes, and they sometimes graduate to real gangster. A person doesn’t have to do all, or even many, of these things to be indecent. All it takes is the attitude and to do a few.

When indecent people use “social critique and rebellion” as a cover for selfish indecency, in addition to betraying humanity and good ideals, they betray all the good causes that are trying for something better and they betray the part of us that wants to tell the difference between a good-cause-with-truth versus a lie. When eco-activists put spikes in trees, that act is not social protest but indecency. When men say that bullying women “is in our culture, and you cannot judge us from the outside” that is not political correctness, it is selfish manipulative indecency. When young people start fights in shopping malls, that is not social protest over indulgent consumerism, social critique about what poor people cannot afford, or free speech, it is selfish indecency.

### **(C2B) Indecent: Hard Life**

I cannot draw the line between what is a hard life and what is not. I cannot draw the line between a hard family life and an easy family life. I don’t know what it takes to make a person justifiably bitter. I do know that nearly all people have had enough hardship in their lives, even people who look sunny, clean, and at ease. Many people who might have the right to be bitter rise above it and try hard to be good to all the people around them. See the movies “Happyness” and “John Q”. I focus on people who blame everyone but themselves and who take their bitterness out on other people. They use hardship, especially a hard family life, as an excuse. It is easy to mix the excuses of a hard life and social injustice because social

injustice leads to a harder-than-average life. I don't try to untangle the two excuses. I do not critique the "culture of victim" that grew in America after 1970.

People who slip into bitterness also make themselves bullies and thugs. I have seen bitter people pick hard on other people at work. I have seen bitter people pick on other people to the point where it drives other people almost really crazy and drives them out of a job. I have seen bitter people attack people at work, push them down, and break arms. I have seen bitter people pick on an apparently happy person and gossip about that person until they have turned other people against that person. I have seen bitter people pick a scapegoat who has done nothing to anybody, and then work against that person until he-she breaks down. I saw a bitter supervisor at work pick on a talented diabetic old man until the old man had to quit and then died a few months later. Bitter people claim "I have six kids and twelve cousins to support so I have a right to not pay my share in social events at work, take more than my share, steal, and make other people do my work." Bitter people never see the big part the play in their own hardship. They never see how much everybody makes his-her own bed. They never see what they might do to make things better for themselves and other people. Bitter people think they are entitled and deserve more than anybody else to make up for their hardship. They are entitled to the breaks at work and in life. Every gain by every other person is a slight against them, and they take that other person as an enemy to hurt and to bring down. They build themselves up by bringing down people who don't whine and who don't share stories of hardship.

In taking out their bitterness on other people, bitter conniving people undermine the idea that we should feel for other people and help other people. They undercut normal human empathy and sympathy, and so undermine what is human. They destroy our ability to tell normal hardship that we all have to endure from extra hardship that we all need help for. They undermine the Golden Rule and the idea that rules apply equally to everybody.

Before the late 1980s, we saw bitter conniving indecent "culture of victim" people as coming entirely from the poor and the Left. Since then, I have seen middle class, upper middle class, and wealthy people adopt the culture of indecent bitter conniving. They blame the poor and the working class because they are not wealthy enough. They see tax laws as aimed at hurting them personally, John Smith and Joan Jones. They think every law about taxes and the economy is aimed at killing off their particular business or undermining their position as a house owner. They know that the poor and working class pay more proportionately in taxes than they do, yet they find excuses to further reduce their own taxes and further hurt the poor and the working class. Doctors and dentists overcharge working people because "now all working people are in unions and have health insurance, health insurance companies are unfair to us, we have to provide everything for ourselves, and so working people are actually over-privileged compared to us". I have also seen some decent doctors and dentists undercharge working people because they knew their families were having a hard time.

### **(C2A and C2B)**

Both kinds of indecent people abuse programs such as welfare, food stamps, Social Security Disability, Aid to Dependent Children, Affirmative Action, anti-discrimination rules, tax breaks, aid to small business, aid to research, aid to farms, and aid to big business. They know all the right phrases to get programs to work for them. They know all the right phrases to attack some person or some agency with a charge of

racial or gender discrimination. They know how to get a job and keep a job using Affirmative Action, even when they are not as qualified as other applicants, are not really qualified, or don't work after being hired. They know all the rules that they can use to advantage. They know how to attack a fellow employee who is not "one of them" by charging bias. They know how to attack administrators, teachers, TAs, fellow students, fellow employees, and bosses with charges of bias. They know how to milk the system from their position.

Constantly they pout, whine, connive, connive to get around somebody, connive to get ahead, connive to put somebody else down, chew on grudges, complain about "the women" and "the men", complain about other ethnic and gender groups, "those people", point out faults, and justify themselves. This is not just the grumbling that all humans do.

Indecent thugs with an excuse are not limited to any ethnic or gender group but show up in all groups with adjusted dogma to fit the group. There is not much difference between a Black minor thug and a White minor thug except the cars they drive, music they blast, and some of the imagined insults for which they hit. It takes no more excuses to enable a White skinhead than it does a Black "gangsta".

Indecent thugs with an excuse know they don't really get the issues that their dogmas intend to explain or get the dogma. They don't care. They want an excuse to act out harshly and to promote "us" against any convenient "them". That is all that the dogma, or any ideas, really mean to them.

### **(C3) Indecent: Milking the System While Looking Good.**

Indecent people of type 2 (social injustice and hard life) milk the system because, first, they find excuses that work, and, second, they manipulate programs such as welfare, ADC, and the courts. That is not who I am after here. I focus on people who look good while they milk the system. I am not after rich people as such. I don't care about people with toys. I don't care about people who "flaunt it". They might be low class at heart, uncouth, annoying, and clutter the airwaves, but they really cause little harm. I don't care about people who cause little harm.

Many indecent people who milk the system while looking good are the slick rich and powerful people that the Bible warned us against, and that I said I am not concerned about here. Even so, I have to mention them because they cause damage, to leave them out enables other indecent people, and there are some type 3 people that the Bible did not warn us about. I say only as much as needed here.

I have in mind bad professionals such as some professors, lawyers, doctors, and teachers, school board members, school trustees, business people, politicians, and bureaucrats. Dentists who charge \$50 for a five minute consultation to validate what the hygienist already saw are indecent no matter how much they tell themselves it is part of the profession, and they are entitled because of their education and the needs of an expensive office. Professors who get grant money, and finagle a high salary, are just as adept at milking the system as welfare mothers with six kids or spoiled athletes. I have in mind business people who know how to get grants for their own business, grants that were originally intended for small firms or to help nature. They are worse than greedy dentists and professors. Business people who know how to donate to campaigns to get tax breaks and reduced liability, even as they whine about big government and benefit programs for the poor, are as bad as drug dealers. Farmers who know that support for farms

is outmoded, promotes corporations more than families, and is overall hurtful, are as bad as people who ride on unemployment insurance. In the housing debacle of 2000 through 2012, the finance industry in the United States severely hurt the overall economy of both this country and the world, for its selfish gain. People that invested in houses to flip rather than in homes to live in, and people that took mortgages that were just too good to be true, are as much at fault as the finance industry. Middle class people who pay less in overall taxes than the poor pay, get benefits from mortgage relief, get benefits from services such as police, schools, fire protection, recreation, and government-back insurance, and yet refuse to honestly evaluate the tax system, are indecent. Business people who distort an industry (in economics jargon, add to “structuring”) such as farming, banking, oil, or natural gas, distort the economy for their benefit and hurt everybody. Too often, indecent people get privileges by giving to legislators.

Three kinds of person who milk the system I find particularly disgusting.

First, I dislike people of one race, religion, gender, or any group, who wait for their declared enemies to misstep, pounce on it as if the world were at stake, persecute the mistaken person, thus gain greater praise from fellows, gain a feeling of justification for him-herself, never go beyond this event to see the true problems, and thereby betray his-her own group and all society. Black people who wait for a White person to screw up so they can pounce on him-her, without really getting to underlying problems, are indecent. White people who pounce on all Black people when one Black person lives down to a stereotype are indecent. Women who wait for men to “act out as pigs”, without trying to know human nature and the root of gender roles, are pigs too.

As bad as it was, the incident of Trevon Martin and George Zimmerman did not deserve the spin it got. Every year, far more Blacks kill far more Black people than Whites kill Black people. As I finished this chapter, a White policeman outside Saint Louis, Missouri shot and killed an unarmed young Black man, Michael Brown. The details of the shooting had not been released as I wrote this. Michael Brown had earlier beaten up the proprietor of a convenience store, a man half his size, and robbed the store of a pack of small cigars. For at least five days after the shooting, Blacks rioted and looted. Al Sharpton rushed to the scene to condemn the shooting. As bad as it might be, the shooting of Michael Brown is not much worse than the rioting and looting. The shooting is less a crime than the bad education that is acceptable to Black parents. Every year, about 100 Black people are shot and killed by Police officers. Every year, Blacks kill far more Blacks than police officers kill Black people. Blacks cause far more fear among Blacks than Whites do. Black people spend little time protesting Black schools and Black crime, far less than they spent on Martin and Brown.

Second: I dislike people who use rules (laws) that are supposed to promote racial, religious, gender and other equality for their own narrow benefit, especially if they hurt others. This is the same as a business person in a big firm exploiting laws that were intended to benefit small firms, as when a big firm starts a subsidiary company to get funds for research that were originally intended for small firms. When a person uses Affirmative Action to get into school, stay in, get a job, hold a job, or to get a promotion, regardless of qualification, that person is indecent. Affirmative Action should apply only when people are otherwise equally qualified, and then only in limited doses. Affirmative Action was intended to help mostly Black people. I think the biggest beneficiaries of Affirmative Action have been White women while Black men have benefitted little. This does not mean Black people do not abuse Affirmative Action or White women have not done a good job, but it does show distortion, distortion that amounts to indecency. The same

applies when a person abuses a charge of sexual misconduct. A bad charge hurts not only one person but all people who might have benefitted from the system if it worked properly. The same applies when a group of one race or gender inside a workplace “gang up” to control the workplace environment to harm other people and the gang uses laws that were intended to protect victims as a cover.

Third: I dislike people who abuse programs that were designed to help poor and sick people in unusual distress even if the abusers themselves are poor, sick, and otherwise good people but are not in unusual distress. Welfare was originally designed to help poor people, for a while, who faced sudden intense hardship. I find indecent the people who have more children than they can directly support and count on the state to act as a surrogate parent. A mother who has even one child, but she cannot support that one child, and instead counts on the state to act as the father, is indecent even if she is poor and otherwise a good person. The more children a woman has that she cannot expect to support herself but counts on the state to act as daddy, the worse she is. To abuse programs like welfare undermines the program and abuses people that the program was originally designed to help. People who get a doctor to certify that they are unhappy and therefore deserve Social Security Disability are indecent even if otherwise they are good people who want to stay in their home towns and who go to church regularly.

These type 3 people cause harm both directly to society as a whole and indirectly through bad example. They know it. It doesn't matter whether indecent people of types 2 or 3 cause the most harm. What does matter is that they both cause considerable harm. They are both thugs with excuses.

One of the biggest harms done by indecent people of type 3 is to provide an excuse for indecent people of type 2. As long as everybody can see that some people milk the system, get away with it, are helped by the law, and look morally good doing it, it is hard to tell other people to stop feeling angry and to stop being indecent in type 2 ways.

If we stopped all people of type 3, that doesn't mean we would also stop type 2. Thugs find an excuse. If we take away one excuse, they find another. The point of stopping type 3 is not to stop type 2. The point is that type 3 is indecent and bad itself. We need to go after it for the damage that it does. We can never completely stop people from milking the system any more than we can stop all thugs with an excuse. But we can minimize milking the system. We can get across the message that we know what is going on, we don't like it, and we intend to take realistic steps to stop abuses. This we have not done in America for a long time.

### **Purveyors of Bad Ideas.**

Where do indecent people get the ideas behind the excuses? They pick up excuses from anywhere, and have been doing so since childhood. The actual formal ideas come from ideologues, rebels, pop culture, the entertainment industry, activists, and purveyors of half-true ideas such as politicians, TV and radio commentators, TV and radio talk shows, comedians, and so-called news shows on cable TV – all on both the Left and Right. Sometimes indecent people get excuses from bad decisions of the Supreme Court. Ideologues, rebels, comedians, commentators, etc. purvey half-truths that are n worse than lies. I cannot be more specific for fear of being sued.

Where do the purveyors of half-truths get their ideas to hand down to truly indecent people? Mostly they inherit ideas from past economists, philosophers, artists, jurists, and good politicians without knowing where the ideas first came from. Almost always the ideas that are handed down are not the full ideas but are only distorted abused bad half-true versions of better ideas. The idea that capitalism works well when left alone is true if seen properly but that is not how it is used in propaganda. The idea that America is rich and should take care of under-privileged people is basically true but it has to be combined with reality so we see that America cannot take care of everybody comfortably; and that realism is just what does not happen when the idea excuses clients of the state.

### **A Warning to People Who Fool Themselves.**

Everybody acts indecently every so often. If I do only two indecent acts per week, I am happy. Most of these indecencies are small, and I am not worried about them for this chapter.

Nearly everybody thinks he-she lies on the good end of normally decent. Few of us really lie on the good end of the scale. Most of us are more indecent than we admit. Some of us are indecent but think we are normally decent or better. Most of us fool ourselves. Remember: eventually you are what you do. If you are rude, a bad neighbor, bad co-worker, shirk work, are noisy, dirty, not considerate, cause grief, abuse power, lie, milk the system, find excuses, have attitude, or wait to get up into people's faces, then you are an indecent person even if most of what you do otherwise is passable, even if you also do some decent things, and even if you carry many family members and fellow church people on your back.

Even if they do not cross the line into being an indecent person in general, many normal passably decent people skate by consistently on the low end of the scale, or cross the line into indecency much too often, even if they later cross back with a "good deed"; and they fool themselves about it too. You can do better than that. The people around you deserve better.

Indecent people are good at fooling themselves, probably so they can live with themselves and can better use other people. Nearly all indecent people see themselves as passably decent people who might live a tougher life than average. Some see themselves as heroes who must do tough things in a tough world, like John Wayne, Robert Mitchum, Clint Eastwood, Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie, Shaft (Richard Roundtree), or Machete (Danny Trejo). This is all crap. You are what you do. Someday, with God, you will have to look at yourself, and you will see you are not a tough guy entitled hero. You are just rude and selfish, and cause other people trouble. I doubt many indecent people will read this book, but, if you are indecent and do, use it to wake up.

### **Eliminating Excuses.**

People have had hard lives since forever. Everybody thinks his-her life is tough but, if you ask other people, even people who look calm and happy, you will find that everybody has faced his-her share of divorce, cancer, unemployment, bad schools, arrests, and no money. Social injustice is real and has been real in horticultural, agricultural, and industrial societies, including the states that we all now live in, for ten thousand years. If you are a poor powerless person in such societies, your position can excuse some bad feelings. If you have been a middle class person in America since the 1970s, then you have been hurt by unfair entitlement programs and the world economy. You are entitled to some grumbling but

that is all. I know about social injustice as much as most Lefties or Righties. Social injustice is not a general excuse for everything. It does not excuse indecency and it does not excuse milking the system. You do not deserve anything extra because you have been a victim or have had some hardship. Acting badly does not make up for anything. The only thing that does make up is finding the root causes of problems and working on those. Think about that responsibility rather than about any suffering and any supposed entitlement.

### **A Vicious Circle.**

Imagine the world has been forced into two artificial poles: prudes on one side with naughty chic people on the other. Both sides, in their ways, can damn the other side and can resort to mental and physical violence. Suppose a reasonably decent person tries to talk to either side. Prudes hear only a defense of self-indulgence and badness. They hear only moral relativism that excuses and enables whatever badness people wish. They hear only the glamorization of badness. To reinforce their position, they act prudishly. They are strict, accept no missteps, and punish all mistakes harshly. In contrast, chic naughty people hear only boredom, refusal to face life in all its complexity and richness, and fear. They hear excuses for the rulers to continue domination through guilt. To reinforce their position, they make a point of breaking rules, stress moral ambiguity, and seek people who cannot live by prudish standards yet have satisfying lives. They make a point of having fun in ways that prudes cannot use such as drugs, and in showing that these ways do no real harm. Both sides see selfishness and willful blindness. They talk past each other. Nearly every American has heard this non-dialogue and has been forced into one side or the other.

Talking past each other insures there is no sane middle ground. There can be only two poles. The two poles reinforce themselves by contrasting themselves with the other pole. So they reinforce each other. If either pole were to accept a sane middle, it would undermine the other pole but, in doing so, it would also undermine itself. It is always easier to go to a pole, and to hide in the safety of its dogma, than to find the sane middle. Sadly, in the real human world, two opposite poles are more stable than one sane middle. Two opposite crazy poles arise out of one sane middle. This process is the same split-making that leads to two stable political parties or to two stable enemy-camps-with-many-members in wars. It is easier to have bad guys and good guys than to have human guys. This is an example of what I called "systems that eat the world" applied to decency, prudery, and indecency. Because of this tendency, I don't expect us ever to find a good lasting resolution. I am glad evolution prepared middle moderately decent people who eventually get over their diseases of prudery, indecency, and chic naughtiness.

### **Bad Effects of Enabling Indecency.**

-The worst effect is bad thinking. We can't think straight. We deny an important part of ourselves. We buy into the Romantic myth in the hope of making sense of inversions. We begin a vicious circle in our minds where the myth supports bad ideas and we cling to the myth to make sense of the bad ideas. We lose the ability to think outside the circle.

-We turn young people away from being simply decent or as decent as they can be.

-We hurt decent people.

-We stifle the contributions that decent people could make.

-Indecent people are wasted sentient beings. It is not so much that their lives are not productive as that their minds stay forever dead (asleep). They have wasted the opportunity to be human. They are lost. Of course, inside they are still residually human, and sometimes they do a decent thing in a crisis. But their humanity is not usually available. Indecent people are as screwed up as an animal that has long been tormented in a cage.

-There really are social problems (poverty, abortion, teenage pregnancy, bad education) that need hard work to understand and to help. Indecency diverts us away from them. Indecent people blind us to the real problems and to what really needs to be done. Indecent people fool concerned people into thinking indecent people are relevant. Concerned people fool themselves into thinking they really do something merely by acting out. Genuinely concerned people are co-opted. Concerned people get fooled into enabling indecency. On the other hand, people that want an excuse to ignore social problems use the indecency of complainers as an excuse.

-Showing off can be fun. Indecent people give showing off a bad name.

-Indecent people cause trouble and annoy other people. Indecent people hurt the hearts and stomachs of other people, even other indecent people.

-Resources have to be wasted on indecent people, and wasted guarding against indecent people.

-Indecent people ruin neighborhoods.

-Indecent people ruin their children. Indecent create indecent copies of themselves. Their children grow up never even knowing what decency is. By the time a child is five years old, if they child has grown up among indecent people, that child likely will never change.

-Indecency forces us to choose between trying to save the children of indecent people versus enabling the indecent parents.

-Indecency leads to violence.

-Indecency adds to conflict between groups even when most members are common passable people, such as conflict between ethnic groups.

-Indecency leads to bad politics. Enabling indecency leads to worse politics.

-Enabling indecency leads decent people and ordinary people to feel guilt where they should not feel guilt at all. They feel bad about the bad that indecent people do. They feel responsible for the original issues such as welfare kids even when they did not cause the original problems. In a vicious circle, the guilt allows them to be further used and made into enablers.

-Enabling indecency leads to tolerating indecent behavior that should not be tolerated. It allows indecent people to take advantage of decent people and ordinary people. It allows indecent people to force decent people and ordinary people into the role of enablers.

-Enabling indecency allows some groups to take advantage of others. It allows Blacks to use White guilt, gays to use "straight guilt", Jews to use Christian guilt, Muslims to use Christian guilt, and the Irish to use middle class guilt. It prevents ethnic groups from "calling out" bad behavior by other ethnic groups; or it encourages calling out instances of bad behavior that don't really matter much. It allows bad business people and rich people to cheat the public in the name of creating jobs. It allows all business people to say they are romantic entrepreneurs when really few are.

-Enabling indecency prevents us from knowing when programs work or not. Enabling indecency prevents us from making a good personal welfare system and from making a good system of supporting business.

-Enabling indecency leads young people to misuse (overuse and underuse) alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and sex, and to indulge in too much violence and bullying. Enabling indecency leads young people to strange damaging ideologies of both the Left and Right.

-Indecent people are not needed to make life more interesting, challenging, creative, and, indirectly, better. We can live with far fewer of them.

-We have wrongly romantically inverted the real world to make decency indecent, uncreative, stultifying, boring, and the tool of social injustice while we make indecency decent, creative, creative, interesting, and the vanguard of social justice.

-Indecent people think they are passably decent; but they are not. Indecent people think they are heroes of politics, gender, ethnicity, religion, the owning class, the middle class, the working class, or free people; but they are not. Indecent people think they are hipper and cooler and more interesting; but they are not.

-Indecent people are not the world force of disorder that allows for creativity, progress, and an interesting world. We do not need indecent people to make the world better. Indecent people do make the world more interesting sometimes just as HIV, herpes, the flu, mosquitoes, stupid politics, parasites, a tsunami, cancer, car accidents, disease, famine, war, and bad love can make life more interesting. That does not mean we should confuse indecent people with the world force of creative disorder.

-Indecent people are not "beautiful losers" and demon-haunted outsiders fighting spiritual decay while retaining moral purity. Indecent people have learned to think of themselves that way and to present themselves that way because it works to fool better people. Real beautiful losers and demon-haunted outsiders were not originally indecent until they learned to make themselves that way by internalizing stupid social myths.

-We wrongly think indecent people are creative people while decent people are uncreative idiots.

-We wrongly romanticize indecent people as rebel secret warriors for goodness. We wrongly think all decent people are stooges of the corrupt regime. Wrong political correctness, Right and Left, makes us

pretend indecency is something else, and wrong political correctness makes us enable indecency. Not every angry picket for the Tea Party or for Black Justice is a rebel warrior for goodness. Not every rap song, country patriot song, rock rebel song, or song about a misunderstood criminal is the paean of the people.

-We wrongly think indecency is effective. In fact, nearly all indecent self-styled rebels achieve little good. Few true rebels fighting for goodness are indecent. Few indecent people are secretly rebels who fight for true goodness.

-Self-romanticizing indecent people almost always hurt the causes that they think they help. Black hip-hop “gangsters” and White Supremacists set back the true struggle of Black and White people. Martin Luther King did not die so Black fools could show off their butts and ride around in rolling boom boxes; Thomas Jefferson did not write the Declaration of Independence so White fools could flood the airwaves with lies and ride around shooting out of pickup trucks.

-Indecent people almost always make bad citizens. Besides hurting their own group, they hurt the nation as a whole. Decent people don't always make good citizens but they don't often make bad citizens.

### **Ethnic Groups, Religious Groups, and Other Groups.**

If your group has many indecent people, even if they are a minority, and even if your group has many normal people who obviously value decency, then still other groups will look at your whole group as indecent. Whether this skewering is unfair on some high level doesn't matter because it is part of human nature, and it is a reality of this world. If your group has many people who are loud, dirty, drink a lot, abuse drugs, steal, lie, bully, abuse women, do not value education, are hyper-sensitive to being “dissed”, violent, drive boom boxes, commit assault through noise, commit assault through dress, have unrealistic opinions about race, religion, or politics, wait to catch people in other groups in mistakes, or manipulate the economic and political system, then your group has a serious problem. The bad behavior hurts your group much more than the bad behavior gets back for any prejudice by other groups.

I was a juror in a murder trial in which two young Black men killed a third young Black man, out of a wrong glamorized sense of tough “gangsta” indecency. Their bad idea of respect ruined two families. Over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2014, Chicago had over 200 shootings, most Black-on-Black. In August 2014, as a response to the shooting of a young unarmed Black man outside Saint Louis, Missouri, Blacks rioted for four days and looted stores. What does looting have to do with justice for that Black man or social justice? How is looting anything but indecent? About summer of 2012, close to where I live in Auburn, AL, a young Black man (allegedly) killed two nine-year-old Black twins and their White caregiver, for no reason other than to take the old man's car. The alleged perpetrator had earlier allegedly killed at least two other young Black men but had escaped conviction. In 2012, at a party at an apartment in Auburn, AL, a young Black man shot six other young Black men in a fight over a Black woman. Three of the victims died on the spot. The accused man claimed self-defense. Too many young Black men, and some young White men, think it is unmanly to do school work and to care about mental achievement. Young Black people call doing school work is “acting White” or “acting Chinese”. About 2008, a White fraternity at Auburn University satirized Black people in a play where White kids put on blackface – the school rightfully abolished the fraternity.

All this is a huge price to pay for enabling indecency. The price is paid both on a personal level and at the level of the community. The normal people struggling to be tolerably decent and to raise their children in a tolerably decent world pay the biggest price. In Chicago, Black parents who simply want to send their kids to school, to learn how to make a living, pay the biggest price. It is not a joke.

Every major ethnic group has a subgroup of romanticized indecent fake heroes: Black “gangstas”; White skinheads and low-lifers; White “gangsta” imitators; Hispanic gangster champions of “la raza” and the barrio; and tough up-and-coming on-the-go hustling me-first people of all races. Even if these people are physically tough, and clever in some ways, they are still indecent. These people wrongly see themselves as rebels in the fight for freedom and fairness, and warriors against “the man”. The people in the neighborhood, who are not overtly tough, and who likely are scared, tend to go along. See the English movie “Attack the Block”. In fact, these people are cheap tools of the power elite. Rather than help their ethnic group, help fairness, and defeat “the man”, these people stifle their ethnic group, foster hatred, bleed off energy in useless stupid fake rebellious acts, blind people, and keep smart people in their own group from seeing truly and seeking real solutions. The most successful people in the fight for fairness are not blinded by ideology but seek truth. Decent people are more likely to have clear sight and are more likely to do long-term good than “gangstas” even if “gangstas” see a few things decent people don’t see. Even if your big motive is your own group, and you don’t care about others, still you should also fight ignorant indecency and should promote clear sight and decency. If you believe the myth of indecency, then you are part of the problem, and a traitor to your ethnic group.

#### **A Bad Effect You Didn’t Worry About But Should.**

You live in a nice suburb or a good building in a nice neighborhood in a city, and don’t worry much about indecent thugs with excuses. You live in a bad neighborhood and indecent people are so pervasive that you can’t do anything about it, feel you shouldn’t do anything about it, and feel the absence or presence of a few more indecent thugs with excuses won’t matter. You are both wrong.

Already indecent people are a big drain on America through disruption, crime, abuse of programs such as welfare and aid to business, and by keeping us from achieving the efficiency that we need to compete in the world arena. No matter what indecent people say, society carries them more than it exploits them for gain. Indecent people are a net loss. As America moves into the world economy, we will not be able to afford the burden of many people that we carry now: uneducated, borderline criminals, real criminals, people who have children too young, have too many children, people who abuse programs, have no aptitude for a job that is suited to a modestly successful life, and people who milk the system. We can raise the minimum wage as high as we want but that won’t make indecent people productive members of society; it will only screw up the economy. We can give business firms huge tax breaks and all that will do is erode the tax base. Something has to change. Most likely, from desperation, we will stop caring for indecent people and willfully unproductive people. I don’t know if they will end up in prison but I doubt it because we can’t afford that option either. Somehow, we all will have to deal with this issue. Either we prepare or we suffer.

If you are in a racial group or religious group, Black, White, or Hispanic, Christian or Muslim, with a lot of indecent people who brandish excuses, they will bring your whole group down with them. Your group as a whole will be excluded from whatever accord America finds in the future to preserve the highest

material standard practically possible in the real world economy. Like it or not, groups will still matter in the real world, and, if your group has too many assholes, then your group as a whole will be pushed aside to let other decent groups find security. Your group will be pushed aside even if most people in your group are decent but a big minority is indecent thugs. The presence of indecent thugs in your group threatens your grandchildren directly and harshly, no matter how much you got to church and how much you teach basic skills. They hurt you and your grandchildren. I don't like this but I have seen it.

### **Go Ahead and Judge, Go Ahead and Band with Good People.**

Except for some unusual people such as Taoist adepts, it is not possible to be human without judging other people. Decent people and normal people have to judge. Judging in itself does not make you bad, and judging in itself does not make you judgmental. We have to judge if we are not to promote bad acts, enable indecent people, and allow indecent people to hurt people. Too much indecency prevails in the modern world because ordinary people have bad judgment through bad ideologies. The trick is to judge correctly. I do not run through how to judge correctly. Only by practicing at judging can we avoid becoming a bad judge and a bad person. Only by practicing can we judge correctly. We can only judge correctly if we do not romanticize indecency and if we do not let fear of moral ambiguity make us pretend that we do not judge when really we do. It is better to judge openly than in stealth. Once we have confidence in our ability to judge, we should band together with other people of decent judgment to make a better world and to control badness.

### **Decency, Indecency, Fun, and Interestingness.**

Of all the mistaken ways to denigrate decency and glamorize indecency, maybe the worst is that decent people are necessarily boring while indecent people are necessarily fun. See David the bon vivant really fun tough rebel guy in Part Two. "I don't want to go to heaven because all the interesting people are in hell". If you want to have fun, you have to be indecent. If you want more fun, you have to be more indecent. All indecent people have fun; all people who have fun are indecent; people who have fun have fun only because they are indecent; no decent people have fun; all decent people are boring; most of the boring people are decent. All this is just false.

Sometimes life is boring and naughtiness can be fun. To deny this is bad. To deny this is the same as to deny that drugs, including booze, can be fun and can alleviate the boredom of life. But to admit this is not to assert that naughtiness is always fun and always alleviates boredom. After a while, naughtiness gets more boring than normal boredom. Doubling down doesn't help. After a while, you have to find some way other than naughtiness to make life work. If naughtiness is all that makes life work for you, then you have to expect that eventually you will meet grief and other people will shut you down.

If the world were made entirely of simple decent people, life would be slightly more boring in some ways. Even so, a simple decent world would be better than a slum of annoying indecency, and the world would still be interesting enough. The world would not be boring in general, and it would be better. Because the world would be better to live in, it would be more interesting and less fearful to the many people who are frightened of indecency, so the previously-frightened people would participate more, and the world overall would be more interesting than otherwise. Even if we had to forego the thrill of a few naughty chic-indecent acts, we would do other things more effectively and the world would be more interesting for that.

We would enjoy ourselves, fight poverty, cure disease, recover from typhoons, save nature, explore the cosmos, make art, and sell tasty doughnuts. See the movie "Pleasantville"; even if it is corny it is true. We would not have bad censorship, as in the great "Michelangelo" episode of "The Simpsons". There is little chance the world will ever be made mostly of simple decent people. There is no chance decency will overcome the real world and make the real world deadly boring.

I am not sure where decent people rate on a scale of being interesting and making the world interesting. Many interesting people are decent at heart while many indecent people would be hell to live with. If there is a hell, it will not be full of truly interesting people that you can get along with. It will be like "No Exit" by Sartre. The vast majority of indecent people that I have met are not creative or interesting; they are energy-sucking assholes. People might think indecent assholes are creative and interesting, but they are not. I have met annoying selfish conniving people who have minor talent but not enough to excuse bad behavior. There are plenty of talented decent people that I would rather spend time with, and I am likely to get a lot more out of time with them. Some creative people appear indecent, but mostly that is a pose they take because they have fallen victim to the false dogma that scuzziness goes with creativity. If you look behind the pose, often you find a passably decent person. Apparently that was true even of Lou Reed. I find this pose of scuzziness by would-be creative people sad, funny, and wasteful. If you want to be creative, dare to be decent, dare to embrace the half-way decent person inside.

A small minority of indecent people do contribute. They fight big indecency such as when tough guys in the movies kill gangsters. They have talents other than their indecency that lead us to put up with their indecency. An episode of "Law and Order SVU" showed the military protecting a man who molested boys because the man was a genius with guidance systems. Indecent people make the world more interesting sometimes, although not as much as romanticism makes out. Indecent people do add some things that decent people cannot contribute, and that even passable people cannot contribute. I do not sort it all out here. To deny that indecent people can be interesting is ideological blindness, like denying biological evolution or denying that drugs can be fun. But accepting that some indecent people can be useful or fun sometimes is not an excuse for indecency. Watch the English movie "Attack the Block", and make up your own mind if the movie excuses badness.

The key is not to romanticize and not to enable. You cannot make yourself interesting by making yourself indecent first; you just make yourself indecent. You cannot make yourself more interesting by making yourself more indecent; you just make yourself into an asshole. Great people have flaws. We cannot make ourselves great by imitating their flaws. Jesus drank a fair amount of wine and Winston Churchill drank too much whiskey; drinking more does not make us into Jesus or Churchill. If you want to make yourself interesting, make yourself interesting first. If you want the world to be more interesting, make yourself interesting first.

Sometimes a sitcom or drama on TV adds a little "edginess" to a character to try to make him-her more interesting and maybe more realistic. Sometimes this tactic works but mostly it turns out silly. Mostly it returns attention to the basic underlying decency of the character. In my memory, the first big character on TV who was a deliberate mix of decent guy and naughty boy was "Maverick" from the late 1950s. "Maverick" worked. I loved "Maverick". "Maverick" began a trend. I like mild bad boy characters. But what sticks is their basic underlying decency rather than their surface naughtiness. When Magnum put

his neck on the block to help his friends, he was being decent, not a fun bad boy. The same can be said of the never-ending parade of dysfunctional families following the trail of “Married with Children”.

J.R.R. Tolkien (“Lord of the Rings”) valued all life, and stressed the value even of indecent life. A deeply decent person, Frodo, could not destroy the Ring. In the past, the good guys had spared the indecent evil Gollum when they should have killed him. If Gollum had not lived to destroy the Ring accidentally, we all would be living in a horrible world. We need even indecent people to make a full and complete world. This might be true and it might even be what God had in mind. But Tolkien’s lesson does not excuse indecency. You cannot indirectly save the world by emulating indecency. Acting like a Gollum rebel bad boy does not automatically make you a savior of the world or of your group. Tolkien was not a champion of romanticized indecency, at least not on purpose. Tolkien was fighting British prudes, fighting the death penalty in England, he followed the New Testament in extolling common people, and he was arguing for the value of all life; so he went too far the other way. He romanticized too much when he made his point. In contrast, Frodo needed Sam, a deeply decent person, and physically tough person, to protect him from the indecency of Gollum. Frodo needed Sam more than he needed Gollum. LOTR might have been less as art if, in the end, Sam had taken the Ring from Frodo and tossed it into the Lake of Fire; but LOTR would have been more accurate about how the world works, how the world should work, and how we need to see the world.

After you get to a certain age, you need to do what you think is fun, not what other people think is fun. We all take cues from people around us, but, in the long run, we shouldn’t do what we think the cool kids think is fun, and should not depend on rebels, rockers, bad boys, bad girls, true conservatives, or what Ronald Reagan would do. If you can’t figure out fun for yourself, then take time to pick a good reference group. Don’t let TV, media, or myths pick one for you. If fun for you is deeply indecent or criminal, like getting drunk four times a week, beating up your girlfriend, or beating up queers, or if you think you have to do that crap from time to time, then you have some serious issues that this book can’t help with. You are wrong and bad, and you need to stop.

### **Decency Needs Indecency; Good Needs Evil.**

This section is important for a later chapter on the problem of evil. See above about Tolkien.

Some decent people are born fully decent and don’t have to learn to be decent. These people are like walking angels. They appear in all cultures, races, and religions. These people do not have to learn about indecency in order to be decent. Decency can exist apart from indecency. Sadly, naïve decent people are also easy victims, and they disappear quickly unless they are well buffered by a lot of other nearby decent people and other halfway decent people.

In contrast to natural decent people, most decent people start out with a predisposition to be decent, and then learn to be even more decent. Most halfway decent common people have to learn about decency so as to stay as decent as they can be. To learn to be decent, we need experience of indecency. We experience a lot of indecency by meeting normal common people who make mistakes, but even that might not be enough. To learn about indecency, we need to experience really indecent people, survive the experience, and then not be so traumatized that we can’t learn from what happened. Sadly, I have met decent people who have been so badly hurt that they remain “frozen”.

Except in some ideal managed world of the future, wherever there is decency, indecent people arise to prey on decent people. That is what happened in our evolutionary history. As a matter of fact, decency and indecency will almost always appear together. When we see two things that always appear together, we are tempted to read a lot into their co-existence. We are tempted to see them as needing each other in a deep way, and as necessarily forming each other. We should not make this mistake. We can see the co-existence of decency and indecency, and even see relations between them, without also assuming anything metaphysical.

To achieve our full potential for decency, we need indecent people. This sounds as if I am saying that, to achieve full goodness, we need badness, or, in other words, good and evil depend on each other and make each other. One could not exist without the other. Set aside for now that question. What I am saying is we should not romanticize relations between goodness and badness, between decency and indecency. Decency can be made better and more decent by its encounter with indecency but we should not raise indecency into a co-equal cosmic metaphysical principle.

We would need decency even without indecency and evil so as to handle the problems of a hard and uncertain world. We need decency to handle storms, fires, accidents, childbirth, disease, and old age. Not all arguments, conflicts, and wars are born of indecency. We need decency to handle those too. Decency can exist on its own apart from indecency.

In some individual cases, decent people become better when they encounter indecent people. They could not have become as good as they are if they not encountered indecent people and suffered first. In some cases, people need to encounter indecent people in order to become decent in a deep qualitative way that they could not have become otherwise. Some victims of violence, stealing, and war, as a result of their encounters with indecency, become good in deep ways that other people cannot reach. However, in some individual cases, decent people do not become better, or do not become enough better, or even completely collapse, as a result of evil. Evil really does hurt.

Decency adds to the total of goodness of the world while indecency subtracts. When decency makes up for the hurt of indecency, sometimes it adds more than enough goodness to make up for what indecency took away from the world. Sometimes it does not. One mark of evil is that it cannot be undone; evil cannot be made as if it were never. It is not clear if we can add enough good after evil to make up for the harm. In some cases, at least, maybe many, we cannot. If so, then it is not clear that the total sum of goodness in the world is greater because of evil, because decency adds enough more goodness when it counters indecency to make up for the loss of goodness. Of course, even if decency cannot make up for the harm of evil, decency still has to try, decency still has to remain decency. We cannot see good and evil, decency and indecency, in terms of mutual dependence where evil spurs decency to be even more decent and to make the world overall better.

I do not know what to make of all this. I admit some evil can make us better but I do not think evil was put here to make us deeply better. It is more like something we have to endure. I do not think the factual co-existence of decency and indecency means something metaphysical and that good and evil are somehow interlocked siblings.

I am not sure how Western people thought of these problems before Romanticism. In the recent world of romanticized pop culture, we can get a sense of how people see the issues in such movies as “Legend” with Tom Cruise or the “Batman” series. Especially in the “Batman” comic books and movie series, the Joker and Batman make each other. If the Joker had not killed Bruce Wayne’s parents when Bruce was young, Bruce would never have become the Batman. If the Batman had not arisen, the Joker would never have been inspired to his great crimes. Neither can ever finally defeat the other. Each inspires the other to go beyond himself. This relation was evident even when Heath Ledger played the Joker because the Joker did not necessarily cause the rise of Batman but the Joker makes clear that they need each other now. The same relation is extended to Batman’s other enemies, and the enemies in many comic books, movies, manga, and movies about vengeance. Good and evil make each other and need other. This view makes for some really fun movies but it is deeply wrong.

### **Decency, Indecency, and Meeting God.**

I can’t say what happens to people after they die on the basis of decency, because they felt the need to make the world a better place, felt the need to use their talents, did something extraordinary once or twice in a life, were ordinary passable people, or were indecent, trash, or a criminal. When we die, we face God, and, if God wishes, he makes us confront who we are and what we have done. Maybe the worst fate for an indecent person is to make him-her think, see who he-she is, and feel the harm done. Thai Buddhists call this being forced to face yourself.

I think God likes decent people, enjoys normal people who work hard to make the world a better place and who try to use their talents well, admires people who do extraordinary things, likes passable people and indulges them, and gets rid of indecent people and criminals after he forces them to see themselves. God does toss the trash. The New Testament makes a point of valuing common-passable-normal-ordinary people, and likely knows more than I do, but that attitude still does not make clear what God will do with them. The New Testament does not guarantee they will be saved. In fact, it implies that most of them will be discarded. Fiction writers distort passable people so as to stress how lovable common people but usually distort decent people with annoying flaws. Many of Dickens’ characters fit this mold. Every sitcom since “The Honeymooners” has done this.

### **Decency as a Reflection of the World.**

I have said the world is as it is, and is not otherwise. Decency is not a fully rational approach to the world based on a realistic vision of how the world works, except in rare cases where near-decency prevails. Simple naïve natural decency makes sense in an American or Japanese middle class neighborhood but not in an American urban blight zone – although, when done there, simple natural decency does make a different kind of transcendent sense. Yet I still urge decency. How realistic it is to try to make the world a better place depends on how amenable the world is to your efforts. Decency has not remade the world. Even if the world is not much amenable to decency, I still urge us to try. I urge us at times to go against how the world really is, and thus I imply that the world is not as it is. This is a contradiction on one level. I don’t think it is a deep contradiction, and it doesn’t bother me. This topic also is too much to go into here, so likewise I pick it up again later in the book.

The remainder of this chapter is optional. If bits of it are tedious, skip around.

## PART 2: THE IDEOLOGY (DOGMA) OF INDECENCY

What follows is not a history lesson. I don't guess why things happened. I only narrate what happened as it is relevant. I don't expect you to read any philosophers so I don't cite specific works. You can skip this part without loss of continuity but it is sort of fun, especially the story of David.

### European Stage.

The West has appreciated, and sometimes glamorized, outsiders and the underbelly of society at least since Roman times. Low-life people, drunks, prostitutes, pimps, criminals, and Cynic philosophers were a source of fun. Despite glamorizing outsiders, Romans did not emulate them or think they were spiritually superior. All states societies know that rich and powerful people sometimes act badly but put on prudish hyper-decency to cover themselves and to control others. Tanakh (Old Testament) prophets skewered these people and this hypocrisy. Corruption of the rich and powerful does not mean all society is corrupt, indecent, and invalid. The West accepted that truth can come from outside standard sources including from the underbelly of society, outsiders, and criminals. Yet the West did not usually look to them as the source of the best and deepest truth. The West usually has not advocated adopting the ideas, outlook, manners, dress, speech, and life-ways of outsiders, the poor, rebels, etc. While Jesus felt sympathy for the poor and for people on the outside, and insisted we act kindly to them, he did not say to emulate them just because they are outside. Thoughtful people in the West said glamorizing outsiders, underbelly, etc. could be silly and wrong. Fiction writers both recognized the tendency to glamorize low-life people and they made fun of the tendency.

Fascination with outsiders etc., yet not emulating them, appear clearly in Chaucer from the late 1300s. The ideas are well-said by 1610 by Shakespeare, especially his Henry plays, and Cervantes, not just in "Don Quixote" but in stories too, for example, "The Little Gipsy Girl" and "Colloquy of the Dogs". Prince Hal could glean wisdom from Falstaff but he did not rely on Falstaff or become Falstaff.

Sometime after 1600, glamorizing outsiders, rebels, outlaws, and criminals became more earnest. John Milton, in "Paradise Lost", in 1667, did not intend to make Lucifer a fascinating seductive "bad boy" but that is how Lucifer came off; what happened to Milton is typical of what happened in the West in flirting with badness. The early modern poetic statement that "indecent satisfies in a way goodness cannot" is "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" by William Blake in 1790; it might be the West's first modern graphic novel. A rebuttal from the mid-1900s is "The Great Divorce" by C.S. Lewis.

Western thinkers began to wonder how society worked on its deepest level, usually to figure out how to govern best. We got Hobbes and Locke. In the early 1700s, thinkers began to see European society as intrinsically corrupt. Under ideal conditions, society might work well. But under the real conditions in Europe, society did not work well. People from within society could not see the deep problems of society. A person had to stand outside society to see what was going on and to give advice that was not tied to the interests of some group in society. People outside standard European society were better people than Europeans, in their turn: peasants, hunters, artists, craftspeople, Bohemians, Gypsies, Celts, Slavs, Greeks, Chinese, Hindus, Africans, etc. Europeans developed the idea of the "noble savage", who lived far away in the Americas or the Pacific islands, somewhat as we now think of Sasquatch. Thinkers saw

the order of society as the order that stifles and brings Death. Rebels were the creative chaos from which all future goodness comes and which brings Life. At first, these ideas served the Protestant rebellions. Later the ideas served the democratic rebellions such as the French Revolution. We still believe these ideas. If one thinker can serve as an example for this trend of thought, it is Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the middle to late 1700s.

I think: Society does have problems, and often we do need to stand outside to see clearly. Yet, to stand outside society, and see how things really work, you do not have to be a rebel, low-life, member of the underbelly, worker, peasant, criminal, or artist. Philosophers, for over two thousand years, had advised standing apart so as to think better and see clearly. They did not say a person had to become a rebel, member of the underbelly, etc. to stand outside and think clearly. They did not say a person had to be apparently indecent to think clearly, know what to do, and be really decent.

After about 1750, some Western thinkers did say just that. You could only really see clearly and do the right thing if you stood outside as part of the underbelly. As a committed outsider, you would seem a bit indecent, and, in fact, be a bit indecent by prevailing standards. You could be indecent on the outside but, really, decent inside. Corrupt rich powerful people who ran society were the opposite: apparently decent on the outside but indecent inside. Society necessarily has a big secret about evil and corruption living deep in its heart. Society does not work well and does not serve the people.

Thinkers in the West not only enjoyed outsiders, underbelly, etc. as the Romans and Chaucer had done but glamorized them as rebels against social injustice, people with unique insight into deep truth, whose life-ways were deeper and better. Outsider rebels are the creative chaos that brings new better orders. Thinkers disparaged not just rich powerful people who perverted decency but other types that had once supported society and morality: old people, parsons, merchants, craftspeople, farmers, squires, soldiers, doctors, and lawyers. In their old beneficial appearance, these types were good-if-a-bit-silly-common-normal characters in Jane Austen and Walter Scott. Then they became stupid, their ways of life invalid, the carriers of hypocritical prudery, and servants of the rich and powerful. Rebellion is on the side of life while staid decency is on the side of death. Society necessarily kept deep bad secrets that benefitted the rich while hurting the common people. Powerful people tried to bury the truth while rebels and outsiders revealed it. Wittingly or not, the common people helped powerful rich people to put down outsiders and rebels and helped to bury the truth.

The “bad boy” side of Lucifer came into its own. Novelists admired the “saucy manners” of the rebel and highwayman. By the early 1800s, the Bronte sisters (“Jane Eyre”, “Wuthering Heights”, and “Shirely”) replaced Jane Austen. Henry Fielding (“Tom Jones”), Charles Dickens (many novels), Robert Louis Stevenson (“Kidnapped”), Alexander Dumas (“The Three Musketeers” and “The Man in the Iron Mask”), and Victor Hugo (“The Hunchback of Notre Dame”) replaced Walter Scott. The detective story and the story about demented genius were born, as in E.T.A. Hoffmann. Sherlock Holmes adopted disguises from the lower classes to investigate the shocking truth hidden under layers of lies.

To keep perspective, I point out some cause-and-effect: Not all goodness comes from creative chaos. Not all chaos is the birthplace of beneficial order. Some chaos is just bad. Even if some chaos is the birthplace of future goodness, not all rebels and outsiders represent that chaos. In fact, they might work against that creative chaos. Not all orderly society is bad. Not all bad society is orderly. Some orderly

society is good. Some bad society is chaotic. Society really has problems, and we need to think clearly about them. To think clearly and act well, sometimes you need to stand outside. Standing outside, you might seem indecent. Yet not all outsiders who act indecently also are true rebels who see clearly and act well. Not everybody who appears indecent outside is decent inside. You cannot make yourself into a true rebel, a decent person inside, and do the right thing, by first standing outside and acting indecently. You only make yourself indecent. You cannot become Stephen Hawking by sitting in a wheelchair; you only cripple yourself. You cannot become Albert Einstein by learning to play the violin and to sail. At best, you develop some hobbies. Most indecent people are just indecent. Most people outside society are not inwardly decent rebels, seekers of truth, and workers for justice. Many people outside society are indecent. Not everybody who appears decent outside is indecent inside. Not all common traditionally decent people are lackeys of the rich and powerful. Most people who are decent on the outside really are half-way decent or try to be decent.

Sadly, people did make all the mistakes suggested above, and the pattern of mistakes became a stance. Chaos is the birthplace of all good society, chaos is the only birthplace, and rebels are the only bearers of good chaos. Rather than become seekers of truth and social justice first, without regard to indecency, people identified with the underbelly of society and acted indecently first. People believed that being a marginal person and acting badly made them into a person abiding in truth and justice who acted well. External decency always is a cover for social injustice while external indecency is always a sign of deeper decency. So you could and should act indecently first. If you act indecently first, you necessarily uncover the truth, serve justice, and become a glamorous rebel outsider. If you act indecently while “other people” act decently, you are right while they are wrong. This is part of the ideology of indecency. Nearly all this ideology is wrong. Read the novels of Joseph Conrad, particularly “The Secret Agent”.

The stance became a source of indecency and of excuses for indecency. If you wish to act indecently, for any reason, good or bad, you can claim to be a rebel in search of truth and justice. Thugs could claim that, really, they are outsider rebels fighting for truth and justice. You can do whatever indecent thing you want, and claim that you are indecent on the outside but decent on the inside. If you want to act out and indulge, just claim you are a victim and a rebel. If you wish to discredit any group, first describe them as people with power who use hypocritical fake prudish hyper-decency to bury the truth, or describe them as stupid common lackeys of indecent powerful people. Listen to “Oliver’s Army” by Elvis Costello for the bad rebels in the Cromwell Protestant rebellion in England and their modern counterparts.

Without going into any details, the idea that true rebels stand outside and seem indecent, while the rich, powerful, and corrupt stand inside and seem decent, goes well with other Romantic inversions. Briefly, the old guard is the old form of the Spirit that is about to be superseded. While their external decency might once have been decent, it is indecent now. The rebel outsiders are the new form of the Spirit about to ascend. Their manners seem indecent because they must overcome the rigid behavior of the old form of the Spirit. The old guard is the Spirit providing resistance to itself while the rebels are the Spirit as it overcomes its own resistance. This is all silly but people buy it, often without knowing so. Most people who embrace the ideology of indecency also embrace Romanticism and its excuses, and vice versa. The two seem to come as a set.

While the dogma of indecency is silly, it is artistically fruitful. Without it we would not have Frankenstein, Dracula, vampires, werewolves, spies, the modern seductress, detectives, mastermind criminals, rogue

cops, gunslinger cowboys, good hearted gangsters, good hearted whores, tough girls, rock and roll, hip hop, shamans, wizards, and so much more. If you can enjoy the art without falling into the dogma, that is a good thing. The excuses that come of the dogma are another thing altogether. They are bad. I look at them in sections below. Don't fall into excuses and indecency. Don't let art fool you. Listen to all of "The Clash" for a band that both bought the dogma and knew it was wrong.

Again, the obvious course is to act decently, search for truth and justice, seek other decent people, seek other people who search for truth and justice, and trust your intuition about decent and indecent despite appearances. If you have to stand on the outside for a while to get a better perspective, then do it; but don't make a virtue out of standing on the outside for its own sake. Again, if it were that simple, I wouldn't have to write. I only urge again what philosophers have been saying for thousands of years.

To be fair, not everybody who takes the stance of a glamorous outsider rebel is a criminal using excuses. Most are harmless. They add to the spice of social life in the modern world, and some glimpse more truth through taking that stance than if they had merely plodded along as a slave of the system. Conservatives deliberately mistakenly brand all scruffy people as criminals. We need to develop our ability to sort out: simple decent people, people who seem odd because they stand apart in a search for clarity, people who take the pose of the indecent artsy rebel, people who temporarily act indecently from desperation, really indecent people who use the stance for excuses, and people who milk the system while looking polite. One aim of this chapter is to help us do this.

We are susceptible to the dogma of indecency. Indecent people adopt the ideology it because it works. They fool themselves for their gain and fool other people to their loss. Regardless of where the dogma began, now it has spread beyond Europe and America. Any full account of why we are susceptible to the dogma of indecency would require looking both at various cultures and at the evolution of human nature – a task beyond this book. One goal of this chapter is to un-fool us about the dogma of indecency, a task made harder by our susceptibility to it.

(Technical note: Soren Kierkegaard, around 1820, explicitly advocated life on the fringe as necessary for honesty, for choosing Life, and for choosing Jesus; he advocated commitment to values; and he fought against Romantic silliness. In his time, his stance almost had to seem contradictory to his fellows. His stance is not contradictory, but he might have been the only one then who knew. Kierkegaard's situation likely added to his cramped style and to later confusion about him. He is worth reading but reading him is like chewing aromatic wood.)

### **The Ideology of Chic Indecency in America.**

As part of the West, America has had three hundred years of a running war between "life stultifying" (Death) versus "life promoting" (Life). Americans misapply this dichotomy in many arenas, one of which is decency. Americans wrongly put decency with prudery, death, social rigidity, and injustice. They wrongly put exuberance, naughtiness, thrills-that-make-us-feel-alive-for-a-bit, and rebellious social criticism with Life and creative chaos. So America also has had a running war between "decency always mistaken as un-chic prudery" versus wrong "chic naughty indecency". To be on the side of Life, people adopt the manners, dress, outlook, naughtiness, and work of people of the underbelly, low-life people, rebels, petty

criminals, artists, and media secret agents. Americans do so even while trying to keep the affluence of the middle and upper middle class.

In the United States, beginning by 1900, and obvious by 1920, non-working-class Americans wrongly identified the working class, artists, gamblers, spiritualists, charlatans, some criminals, and gangsters, with truthful full-of-life outsiders. The working class is full of glamorous rebels and artists forced into crime. In this view, all normal middle class people and working class people with traditional ideas are aides to the hypocritical fake-prudish oppressors. To be on the side of social justice and truth, you have to live like a working class underbelly artist rebel forced into crime and menial labor. Some working class people adopted this ideology as well because it glamorized an identity they could take up and use. Most working class people do not make this mistake but they do get the strategy of glamorizing rebellion and their supposed life ways, and use it when they can: "Joe the Plumber". Thugs and petty criminals from all classes did get the ideology and do use it adeptly for selfish gain. To see the idea, and a critique, watch as much "film noire" as you can stand.

Until recently, the ethnic group that dominated America was Whites. Americans wrongly identified people from any-ethnic-group-but-White with truthful outsiders while all White people are hypocritical fake-decent rigid oppressors. Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and sometimes Asians, are all rebel truthful social critics, especially marginal Blacks and Hispanics. All non-Whites are creative chaos Life while all Whites are rigid hyper-order Death. For instance, all Black musicians are great undiscovered artists. Any Black who followed traditional decency was an "Oreo" (Black outside but White inside) even if he-she worked for social justice. Any Hispanic who went along with traditional decency was Brown outside but White inside. Sometimes one non-White ethnic group gets jealous of the other for taking the lead in being the most secretly deserving. In 2014, Blacks are nervous about Hispanics becoming the chic ethnic group. Hard working middle class Blacks and Hispanics do not really fool themselves that they are all outsider rebels who work against the system and for truth and justice but they do get the ideology and use it. Indecent and criminal Blacks, Hispanics, Whites, and people of all races got the ideology and used it fully for their advantage. To some extent, the same is true of "ethnic" Whites such as Appalachians, Cajuns, rednecks, and "White trash".

This dogma set the mold for action. If you want to push a cause, then identify your cause with rebel outsiders on the side of deep truth, social justice, creative chaos, and life. Find a group who oppose your cause, and label them as rich powerful hyper-prudes using fake decency on the side of rigid order and death. The majority of society serves as their unwitting helpers, at least for now. We are really decent on the inside even if we seem indecent outside while they are really indecent on the inside just because they seem decent outside. Think of your enemies in terms of a conspiracy. In this spirit, women accused men of being fake-decent hypocritical oppressors living in a cabal of "good old boys", and women became rebel outsiders. People of non-stereotypical gender identity ("the gays") accused most "straight" people of being prudish hypocritical semi-closeted oppressors, and took on the identity of rebel outsiders forced into outlandish behavior just to get a fair hearing. Conservatives accused Liberals of eating babies (over indulging in abortion). Proponents of illegal Hispanic immigrants accused Whites of selfishness and of forgetting their own immigrant roots. Rock-and-roll and hip-hop are such rich fields for this game that I don't even touch them.

One, poverty, ethnic fairness, and gender fairness are good causes. Two, some of the energy leading to success came from the ideology of indecency. One and two do not invalidate the other facts that, three, people in causes too often are duped by the dogma of indecency, four, people in the cause abused people in general to help them, and, five, the causes could have succeed as well without the indecency.

Americans support the dogma of indecency because they have no better ideas. Truly indecent people, and criminals, of all groups, support the ideology of indecency just as gangsters supported Prohibition. They flaunt it, because it serves them well. Americans who should know better excuse indecency and enable indecent people even though they see the damage done. Rather than try to deal with the whole situation and come up with a better ideology, they finagle so the damage falls elsewhere.

Most working class people, middle class Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and moderately decent people of all groups resent the ideology of indecency when they realize the implications. They do not wish to have to live as stereotypes “on the outside” to be full humans. Living on the outside is not a good long-term life for their children. Yet they still use the ideology when useful. They try to have their cake and eat it too. This bind has caused a lot of anguish since about 1970.

I do not wish to quell exuberance or naughtiness as long as mild naughtiness does not turn into badness. I do wish to quell naughtiness and chic indecency when they throttle decency and enable badness. This confusion is a serious error with many bad effects.

In the confusion, Americans disdain simple decency and tolerate too much real indecency. We have made chic naughtiness and chic indecency the new fake chic decency while refusing to see what we have done. New-fake-chic-indecency-as-decency is as prudish as the old prudery.

New inverted chic indecency has rules, and, if you don't follow them, you are the new bad. If you aren't cool enough; aren't a bit naughty; a bit “hard ass”; have not been a rocker; lingered in the underbelly of society; gone through a “bad girl” or “bad boy” phase; seen through the Left Wing Conspiracy and stood up as a Rebel Conservative; hit back at “the man”; hit back against an ethnic, gender, or class group who is the enemy of your group; seen through the Jewish-Israeli conspiracy or seen through the Muslim-Arab conspiracy; then you are not decent and not fit for “good society”. If you haven't been indecent, you are not decent. You only get to be decent by being a bit indecent. If you haven't made your first kill yet, you are still one of the half-ass cowardly people who help oppressors. Post 1970s movies and TV satirized this stance because it is funny. Yet it lingers on. The mistake causes real damage. Chic indecency is not “just a phase”. It ruins lives and groups. We see the effect in young stars who have to be “bad”; sometimes they survive to go on to better work; sometimes not. Two who did go on to better work are Dru Barrymore and Robert Downey Jr.

Maybe the first big statement in American fiction that “good is bad, bad is good” and “showing decency in public is a sure sign of deeper indecency” is “The Scarlet Letter” by Nathaniel Hawthorne. I like the novel but it is too easy for people to fool themselves with it. A good modern re-make is the movie “Easy A”. A clear statement both of glamorized inversion of decency-and-indecency, and how much the confusion leads us astray, is the novel “The Great Gatsby” by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The novel is more than a sappy story about doomed love. Much as I like his music, Woody Guthrie shows both all the good insights of adept social criticism and all the bad stereotypes of romanticizing bad boys. His student, Bob Dylan, said

something like “to live honestly, you have to live outside the law”. I return to Dashiell Hammett, the father of modern tough guy detective fiction, in the 1920s and 1930s. He was a real sleuth for Pinkerton, and had a clear view of outsiders and criminals: takers, users, opportunists, and losers who live by the wrong code if they have any code. Middle class people are the dupes of the ideology of indecency. Indecent people and criminals know that, and know how to use it for gain.

From about 1900 until about 1970, things cooked along, sometimes with chic romantic indecency fueling outbreaks of anarchism and pop culture; read “Ragtime” and “Billy Bathgate” by E.L. Doctorow; both have been made into movies.

Contrary to misconception, the 1960s did not see massive indecency, although it did host an increase in romanticizing that enabled indecency later. Indecency, incivility, and disparaging decency increased in the 1970s, and again with the rise of Conservatives in the 1980s, and have stayed high since. The increase in indecency of the 1970s came mostly on the Left, and with ethnic groups allied with the Left, but not because indecency is inherent in the Left. At first, the Left produced the ideologies that allowed selfish people to excuse themselves and manipulate other people, in particular ideologies about social injustice and a hard life. Beginning in the late 1960s with Nixon’s “silent majority” and working class Republicans, and then exploding with Reagan Republicans, the Right caught up, and surpassed the Left in indecency. The Right saw that the ideology of indecency was a powerful force, and figured out how to use it. Conservatives turned into rebels. The Right has ideologies to excuse its indecency by putting the Left on the side of powerful prudish oppressors, such as: all PC is really Left Wing Fascist mind control; the market would be a perfect chaotic system but Liberals perverted it with regulation; Blacks, Hispanics, and poor people are systematically sucking the life out of the White middle class; Liberalism is really all about imposing rigid soul-killing socialism in which all people are reduced to cogs; the real agenda of Liberalism is a great secret that Conservatives must uncover; all Liberals think all abortion is better than all children; and all liberals hate Christianity and want to kill it by attacking Christmas, Easter, Holy Days, Holy Words, Symbols, and Places. Both the Left and Right offer ideologies that have been used to glamorize and enable selfishness and indecency.

Since the 1980s, indecent people of all ethnic groups, religions, classes, genders, and politics have used ideologies on both sides for their advantage. People of all groups still buy into the ideology of inverted chic indecency. We still glamorize rebels who do not really exist. We still enable indecent people and indecency. We still denigrate decency.

### **The Myth of David the Rebel.**

As an example of how ideas can shape us, and for fun, I return to an old story, a myth that has produced ideas of what it means to be a citizen of a state under God. Few Right or Left Wing rebels, activists, or purveyors of half-truths know the links between this story and what they do. They do not draw the same conclusions from the story as I do. Still, it is fun to get a sense of where ideas come from, especially when they come from religious traditions. Stories are part of how we are susceptible to ideologies, and are one way that people fool themselves. They are not the only way. So, looking at a story helps us to get a better feel for what is going on but what follows is not a full account of how we are susceptible to the dogma of indecency or any dogma. What follows is not a general theory of decency, God’s Will, God’s grace, social justice, the just state, tough guys, rebels, or fun.

In the Tanakh (Old Testament) story of David, Saul begins as the anointed (messianic) King of all Israel. Saul commits a slight sin and loses the grace of God. Partly as a result of his sin, Saul suffers from bad headaches and bad temper. He is not fun. Because the king sinned, the entire society is unrighteous, that is, unjust. Originally David was a tough guy guerilla for hire but he came to the attention of Saul, and he could soothe Saul's headaches with music, so Saul kept him on as both musician and guerilla fighter. David likes to sing, dance, and play music, and is an all-around fun guy. God decides to replace Saul with David. God tells David of his destiny and has a prophet anoint David as king (a "messiah"). David now has God's grace. David leads a band of rebel outsider underbelly-of-society bandits in a guerilla war against Saul. David and his band of merry men hide out in the forest, sing songs around the campfire, conduct raids on the powerful and rich, help the people, and restore just society. Soon enough, David defeats Saul, becomes king, restores the Will of God to authority, and restores social justice. Through David, God defeats Chaos and opens the way for Life. David paves the way for the greatness of Israel and the Order-of-God-in-Good-Society under Solomon. David tells the people to sing and dance, and David promotes fun.

David was a real person. The myth of David is an official story written by political priests, after the facts, so as to condemn past enemies of the present dynasty, "them", and to extol ancestors of the present dynasty, "us". David comes off as a humble talented fun servant of God reluctantly accepting God's grace and reluctantly waging war to restore order and social justice. In reality, David was a conniving usurper, bon vivant bad boy, murderer, and coercer of women, who waged guerilla war until he wore down the kingdom and took power for himself.

After David is in power, David does some bad things because he feels he has God's grace and feels he is entitled. Apparently, rebel bon vivant fun guy tough guy saviors of social justice are entitled. Among the bad things, David indirectly murders the husband of Bathsheba and then directly takes her as another wife. David acts indecently. As a result, David loses God's grace and spends the end of his life in lonely misery. Even being a rebel bon vivant fun tough guy savior of social justice cannot make up for abusing the feeling of entitlement, abusing God's Will and grace, and acting indecently.

About the only really decent person in the story of David is Saul's son Jonathan. Jonathan and David became best friends. Their friendship becomes the standard by which other friendships are measured. Jonathan would have been king if God had not anointed David to become king instead of Saul. Jonathan dies in battle, likely at the hands of David's men. In effect, the story says that decency is the first casualty of power-hungry indecency.

No matter how priests fix up the story, David is not a decent man such as modern "family values" people or PC people want as spouses for their children. In the beginning of the story, sometimes decency, the Will of God, grace of God, and fun are NOT together. In that case, it seems we must do the Will of God and seek the grace of God instead of decency. Decency comes behind. It seems people who are a little indecent, a little "bad ass" tough guy, are effective, that is, do God's Will; and they enjoy the grace of God, that is, have fun. It seems people who aren't a bit indecent aren't effective, don't enjoy the grace of God, don't have fun, and don't cure social injustice. Rebel outsiders enjoy the grace of God and do His Will just because they are rebel outsiders. If you want to have fun, enjoy the grace of God, and do His Will, then find a situation of social injustice and join a band of rebel outsiders. It is not hard to find social

injustice because there is some everywhere. Cultivate fun, music, and a “bad ass” tough guy attitude but don’t worry about decency.

I don’t like these implications. I have nothing against rebel outsiders, I like fun, I hope people figure out God’s Will in general and not just to suit their own ends, I hope we all find grace, sometimes we need tough guys, and we must cure social injustice and save the planet. I just don’t like seeing the ideas this simplistic way. The ideas are dangerous when taken simply (“mis-taken”, “miss the mark”, “sinful”). The ideas might be true sometimes but it is bad to take them as true always, and it is a good idea to think hard if you put anything ahead of decency and goodness, especially if you put your ideas of the Will of God and the grace of God ahead of decency and goodness.

Being indecent does not mean you have God’s grace, know his Will, have fun, are a righteous rebel, are a tough guy, and will cure social injustice. Being a rebel does not mean you are a righteous rebel, have God’s grace, know his Will, are fun, will cure social injustice, and are decent enough. Being a tough guy does not mean you are a righteous rebel, have God’s grace, know his Will, are fun, will cure social injustice, and are decent enough. If you want grace, it is not a good idea to make yourself indecent to get it. That was the point of Saul’s original fall from grace and the point of David’s eventual fall from grace. If you want to know God’s Will, it is unlikely you will find it in dogmas or in stereotypes of rebels, tough guys, or fun guys. If you want to have fun and cure social injustice, you might have to do something other than, and deeper than, act out as a naughty tough guy rebel bad boy musician. You have to figure out for yourself the something more and the relation between God’s Will, his grace, decency, and what you do. If you err too far toward indecency, privilege, and entitlement, then God will get you.

At least in the West, all rebels, Left and Right, reflect David. Rebels are fourth-hand David. They all put their ideas of grace and God’s Will ahead of simple decency. Left Wing rebels find grace in coolness and fighting social injustice. To be cool is to have God’s grace; God’s grace is coolness. If you are truly cool, then you have been anointed, have the grace of God, are a fun guy, are a tough guy, what you do is the Will of God, and you will right social injustice. All Right Wing rebels think they already have the grace of God because they are good Christians, Muslims, Jews, or Hindus; and they seek to make real the Will of God in their idea of a proper social order. They can do whatever they want to get there. They have their own version of coolness as a substitute for the grace of God but I don’t go into it. Their version combines religious fervor, political fervor, and smugness. They think they are more fun than other guys because their fun is real and not the put-on forced intoxicated fun of Leftists. Neither side relies on simple decency to seek the Will of God or grace of God. Both sides scorn simple decency as inadequate and not fun.

Some rebels stress fun guy without tough guy, such as protestors from the 1960s and most crusaders for women’s rights, gay rights, and family life. Some rebels stress tough guy such as the bad revolutionaries of the 1970s, and some Black activists, White power activists, and, it seems, the Tea Party. Since the late 1970s, movies about vengeance have mixed the two but mostly they have justified tough guy, as with the “Terminator Series”, spaghetti Westerns, “Dirty Harry” series, “Punisher”, “The Losers”, “Batman” series, etc. Hard-partying tough guy bikers are the same. The fact that most crime fighters have a dual identity reflects the mix of David’s character traits. Most self-styled rebels try to find a congenial mix of fun guy and tough guy, including most campus rebels and rockers.

Both Left Wing and Right Wing rebels teach these ideas to indecent people who use them as excuses to do bad things. Indecent people think they are rebels, real tough guy bad asses, are fun, have the grace of God, and do God's will because they are the victims of social injustice, have had a tough life, or are smart professionals. They are seventh-hand David. In their view, being an outsider does not mark them as losers but marks them as God's fun cool rebels destined to restore a righteous state by defeating un-cool oppressors. Just because indecent people are outsiders, they can do what they want to get back at whoever they want. In doing what they want, they follow the Will of God and have the grace of God. All other people necessarily are oppressors, do not have the grace of God, oppose the Will of God, and are not fun. In Romantic terms, rebels are truly of the rising Spirit while the current power structure is the declining Spirit in opposition to itself.

### **More on Rebels.**

The vast majority of Left and Ring Wing self-styled rebels are not really indecent, no matter how much they frighten old people. They are stylized naughty rather than indecent. I have a soft spot for them because I am like them. Still, rebels are a big source of distorted ideas to really indecent people, so I say something. Both Left and Right Wing rebels use their version of coolness as their equivalent to the grace of God. Both are on the side of creative chaos and Life. Both oppose rigidity and Death. Both use dogmas as their version of the Will of God. Both claim status as rebel outsiders like David because both claim the other side is like Saul, the other side has power, has screwed up the state, is in serious error (sin), and has lost the grace of God. Logically, both the Left and Right can't be David or both be Saul, have power and be outside, at the same time; but they overlook this problems and I don't clarify any of this here. Most readers will have a feel for the silliness.

Any indecency of Right and Left Wing rebels comes not so much from what they do but because they promote ideas even though they know the ideas are half-true and so mostly wrong, and know the ideas enable indecent people. The worst bad idea they convey is to scorn simple decency. One of the worst attitudes they give to truly indecent people is that it is correct to mock simple decency. Cool people like them are above simple decency. Truly cool people are natural rebels, have fun, fight injustice, have God's grace, and deserve the good things in life like David got. Decent people are boring instruments of state oppression. Social outsiders have the grace of coolness and automatically do what is Right, that is, act out the Will of God. If you want to be right and have fun, then be an indecent outsider rebel.

Left Wing rebels include campus rebels, "rocker" rebels, rebel "grrrls", some Goths, campus radicals, professors who think of themselves as radical, most activists, feminists, hipsters, and some slackers. They know something is wrong with society and the world, and want to do something, but can't figure it out. They don't really know the ideas that they espouse. They dress and act like warmed over updated versions of 1950s Beats and rockers. In the 1990s, they looked like James Dean movies made over into Grunge. Because they don't really get issues, often their stance is more a fashion statement, and more acting out, than about how to deal. They romanticize losers, bad artists, the underbelly of society, other rebels, outcasts, any ethnic group but theirs, ghettos, non-conventional sex, and minor gangsters.

In a non-political version, Left Wing rebels are bad boy and bad girl stock characters of comedies such as "Super Bad", "Knocked Up", "Kick Ass", "What Happens in Vegas", and the "Hangover" series. In a more serious mode, they fuel movies such as "Reality Bites", "Sin City", most of the "Batman" series, most films

from Lionsgate Studios, and good “indie flicks” such as “Juno”. The USA channel on TV makes a living from these people, especially as they age.

These days, Right Wing rebels are more important than Left Wing rebels because the Right Wing has co-opted Left Wing rebel ideology and tactics. People barely notice Left Wing rebels now but they do notice Right Wing rebels. No Right Winger can stray far from the prudish stereotype of the good family person and good Republican but Rightists know the prudish stereotype is unrealistic, often boring, and doesn't get the job done; so they want more. They want to be Right Wing David after he was king and before he lost the grace of God - but they forget that abuse must lead to a fall.

It is chic now among the Right Wing to be a rebel outsider. They talk about the Left Wing Conspiracy and borrow terms from the Left such as “hegemony”. They act as if Rightists are an endangered species, and so take the same attitude and privileges as Left Wing groups. They come from Campus Republicans and Young Republicans. They are like the Michael J. Fox character from the TV show “Family Ties”. They still blame their parents for the socialist takeover of America. Although rebels, they also see themselves as staunchly moral, pillars of the community, and the last defense against socialist horror. They do not reconcile the dual images. They are like David after he became king but they (think they) don't make the sins of entitlement but instead serve as guardians of the right order of God. They “call out” professors who espouse leftist ideas in class; and they guard the community against smut. Right Wing Rebels play blues guitar, call themselves “rednecks”, go to rodeos, NASCAR, and wrestling, have public conversions from a previous life of Liberal bleeding heart mistakes, own big guns, yearn to carry them, yearn to use them, sling mud in campaigns, stir up ethnic animosity, try to dominate their wives, try to appear submissive to husbands but really use passive-aggression as well as anyone in a Woody Allen movie, threaten gays, and defend Christmas. They quote Saint Ronald Reagan five times a day. Picketing abortion clinics is a rebellious anti-social act regrettably forced on them by the tyrannical Leftist anti-life agenda. Despite all this hard living on the edge, still they claim they never cheat on their spouses, get drunk, take drugs, or watch porn - anymore. They use state programs to help their business even as they scream against big government and entitlement programs for the poor. While they pay lip service to simple decency, in fact, like Lefties, they are too cool for simple decency and they disdain simple decent people. They convey this attitude to people who are much worse than they are.

As an educated fortunate White man, I find Right Wing rebels mostly fun, as with Left Wing rebels, but Right Wing rebels are not merely fun to all people. Just as Left Wing rebels used to scare oldsters and mothers, so Right Wing rebels scare non-Whites, non-Christians, many women, and people who have read about Right Wing uprisings of the past. American Right Wing rebels are not racist fascists but people like them were the source of racist fascism elsewhere.

Rather than get to the bottom of issues, both Right and Left Wing rebels accept ideas that let them act naughty, and then give these ideas to truly indecent people who use them for real badness. When rebels see the damage done by half-baked ideas, and see the damage done by truly indecent people who use the ideas for excuses, they do not modify the ideas but entrench in them. They “double down”. They are like anybody caught in a plausible fib and who has a chance of getting out of the immediate bind if he-she can push the point and then go away. Committing to an idea they know is not fully true, committing to a fib, distorts their own sense of self, and keeps them from being able to judge themselves and other people accurately. Doubling down has the bad effect of enabling truly indecent people even more. Then

the rebels feel guiltier, get more entrenched, and so on. All this folding and fooling is where the true indecency lies, rather than in adopting outmoded daring ideas. Their stock ideas of rebellion serve as a fund of excuses for truly indecent people, and truly indecent people quickly learn how to manipulate rebel “liberal guilt” or “conservative guilt” to enable indecency.

Both Left and Right Wing rebels think of themselves as the guardians of truth. Guardians of truth do not double down on bad ideas. Both Left and Right Wing rebels think of themselves as preparing the way for a better social order. A better social order does not enable indecency and denigrate decency. Both Left and Right Wing rebels have a duty, by their own standards, to be clear when their ideas are not fully true, could mislead, and are being abused. They have a duty to repudiate abuse of ideas. They have a duty to not enable indecent people and to “call out” indecent people. They have to do this without becoming prudish or fascist. Left Wing rebels have a duty to call out indecent thugs of all genders, races, religions, and socio-economic class. Right Wing rebels have a duty to do the same, including the rich. Anything less is self-betrayal and betrayal of what is high and important. Stop enabling ethnic blackmail, business blackmail, and deniers of climate change.

It is easy to dismiss these rebels as chic posers but often these people are more sincere. Eventually they see that the rebel game is silly and hurtful, and try to move on to better games. Eventually they become the professional people of their time – doctors, lawyers, teachers - and they are often the sincere, active, and socially useful professional people. They also serve as a storehouse of sympathy for the poor and other outsiders, and as a storehouse for some actually useful ideas.

Sadly the Right Wing has developed a hard indecent group to parallel the hard group on the Left. These are the people who scorn simple decency and who hurt simple decent people. These people find grace in forceful dominance either through the body or the mind. The coolness of God's grace is now the thrill of intoxication, domination, or violence. This group uses violence against immigrants and non-Whites, “beat up queers” (“gay bashing”). They are violent skinheads, are White Supremacists, jingoist voters, and your average disgruntled racist on a slow burn. They kill abortion doctors and nurses in the name of Life. They not only sling mud in campaigns, they use dirty tricks such as fear of crime against Michael Dukakis or Swift Boat lies against John Kerry. They buy elections by pouring money into local campaigns even when they have no local ties. They rig elections as in Florida. As with the Left, these Right Wing fully indecent people happily use ideology created by Right Wing Talkers and handed down by Right Wing rebels. They are happy to make Right Wing Talkers and Right Wing rebels feel good by paying lip service to ideology: “Everyone knows that White people have been victimized by Blacks, Hispanics, and all the Left Wing Socialists, so, whatever we do to get back is alright”. These people are the equivalent of the Left Wing Indecent people with the same bad attitude and same keen ability to milk the system but often they are better funded. They have the same nasty habits such as booze, drugs, fighting, attitude, chip on the shoulder, and trashing the place.

The Tea Party waves back and forth across the line between self-styled protesting rebels with half-true totally impractical ideas to political thugs who disrupt daily life and get bad people elected.

To stress: Indecency is not attached to the Left or Right. A White man in Appalachia, who has voted Republican for the last thirty years, but connives to get Social Security Disability, even while he curses Black Welfare Queens, is as indecent and stupid about real issues as a Black gangster wannabe who

shoves little Hispanic ladies at the mall, knocks up a fourth different woman so he can sponge off her check, and voted for Obama because Obama is half-Black, the only time he ever voted. A business man or male professor who milks the system is as bad as a Black woman who uses Affirmative Action to get a job or get ahead. Both groups use bad ideas of the Right (violence) and Left (bad entitlement programs). Both are adept at picking ideas to serve themselves. Both are adept at seeing themselves as victims so they can victimize others.

### **PART 3: SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF INDECENCY**

I cannot always separate rude, selfish, criminal, anti-social, immoral, and indecent people; and there is no point in trying here. It is easier to explain with examples. Sometimes the examples criticize society, but that is not the point. Although full of indecency, I avoid politics, entitlement programs for both individuals and business firms, and PC of the Left and Right. When I use cases from these realms, it is to make an additional point. I skip over religious and political zealotry that causes harm even though it is among the worst indecency. I do not try to assign the examples to one of the groups above because various kinds of indecent behavior runs through all the groups.

Listen to “Maxwell’s Silver Hammer” by the Beatles for a satire of middle class selfish indecency posing as social critique.

Dog fighting, cock fighting, and all animal fighting for sport is indecent regardless of your cultural heritage. It does not make you more of a man. It is just wrong. Cultural heritage does not excuse everything. Social class and poverty do not excuse everything.

The bad neighbors in movies and TV shows are indecent. They don’t have to be ax murderers or serial killers to reach the level of indecency. They don’t have to burn your car or poison your cat. All they have to do is play loud music, play loud TV on a giant-screen home brain-death system, keep it all going late, throw trash around, let their kids run wild, park cars wherever they want, let toys and crap pile up all over, and get so drunk they are dangerous. This behavior is not “Loving Life” and it is not the exuberance of creativity running over.

This example might be surprising. In the 1950s, America had almost no sales tax. When Oregonians learned of a four percent tax in far away exotic New York City, it was a scandal of degeneracy almost like a Roman orgy - a sure sign of failed government. Now a ten percent sales tax is common. A sales tax is strongly regressive, meaning it hurts poor people while it hardly impacts rich people. With a ten percent rate, a poor person pays at least five percent of his-her meager precious total income in sales tax while an upper middle class person pays less than one percent of his-her ample income. A sales tax on food is disgusting and indecent beyond my ability to say. Legislators use a sales tax because they will not – they say “cannot” – levy proper income and land taxes. The middle class and the rich will not stand for fair taxes. The middle class and the rich would rather bleed the poor than face the facts of state finance. Legislators offer this insight into class psychology as justification but it is not justification. One of the most important points of having a government is to help the people overall. One main way to help is to protect people who cannot protect themselves, in this case the poor. Unfair taxes are bad government, hurt people overall, hurt poor people in particular, and set a bad example. For the middle class, the rich, and

legislators to allow a sales tax is indecent. It is a paradigm case of selfishness overcoming basic decency and of how blind we are when we want to be.

Bikers (motorcyclists) love freedom. Contrary to myth, they do not always hate “straight” society or look down on workaday people. They just can’t live like that, and they want the freedom to live in other ways. There is a difference between motorcycle clubs and biker gangs. All gangs call themselves clubs, and I do not sort it out here. To avoid getting sued, I can’t mention any biker gangs by name. Among other illegal income, biker gangs make money by extorting strippers and prostitutes. They “turn out” girls into prostitution, and force girls to work to pay the bikers (I say “girls” instead of “women” because the females are often less than eighteen). Regardless of what you think of prostitution, extorting money from strippers and prostitutes, and turning out girls, is hypocritical and indecent. To value freedom for yourself, and then to take away somebody else’s freedom so you can indulge your own, especially to put someone else into the slavery that you condemn, is hypocritical and indecent. Bikers hate the idea that society tries to “pimp them out” and yet they are pimps. The same assessment is true when bikers terrorize civilians. If you feel the value of not living in fear, how can you needlessly instill fear into other people? Simply saying that you value freedom does not always promote freedom and does not mean you really live free. If you value your own freedom, you have to respect the freedom of others.

Have a long conversation with a dedicated vegetarian or vegan. The issue here is not the lifestyle but the imposition of the lifestyle. Unlike bikers, PC people like to impose. In college, I knew some people who were into “Transcendental Meditation” as taught by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Once they were among a group of friends together on a weekend when I suggested getting beer and pizza for dinner. They gave me a detailed description of how bad those non-foods were for me and gave me many suggestions for what is better. They thought they were improving my health and spirituality but I think they were trying to impose their dogma and lifestyle on me. See the movie “Scott Pilgrim versus the World”, or read the novels, for a funny assessment of the self-made glory and self-styled spiritual power of vegans. If people want to live a certain way, and other people are curious, then explain. Otherwise, imposing is indecent. Usually it is a mild form of indecency but it is still annoying.

While well-intended, much of what the Tea Party does is indecent. Black leaders who wait to pounce on the (often unintended) mistakes of Whites, never explain reality to Blacks, and never offer realistic ways into the future other than “make Whitey pay”, are just indecent. White people who indulge in stereotypes of Blacks, especially with little experience of Blacks, such as “all Blacks are stupid”, are indecent. Blacks who indulge in racism against Whites – and, yes, this does happen – are indecent.

Recently our downstairs neighbors gave me several lessons in indecency. They barbecued with a giant grill made of a split oil drum. The barbecue sent up clouds of acrid smoke which they didn’t suffer from because they lived on the ground floor and the smoke went past their door. The smoke got caught on the big roof overhang and funneled into the upper apartments, where residents choked, and where we live. When I asked them to move their barbecue out a couple of yards, we almost got into a fight because they assumed I was telling them what to do. They couldn’t let anybody outside their clique trample on their freedom, especially somebody who might not be of their socio-economic class or race. Even when I explained the problem, they only moved the barbecue when it was clear I would make a fuss. They liked the idea that they could do what they wanted, and get pleasure, while other people suffered, and other people could not do anything about it. They liked having excuses based in imagined class and race.

They liked to have friends over several times a week to chain smoke cigarettes and chain drink beer. They threw all the butts, all the bottle caps, and half the bottles on the lawn. Children who played on the lawn got cut from caps and bottles and got sick from butts. Although the people downstairs had children of their own, they didn't care. All this might be dismissed as annoying rather than indecent but it fits into a bigger pattern. During their parties, the men liked to talk about how they had to knock around their girlfriends because bitches didn't respect them. Bitches "dissed" them ("disrespected"). The men liked to talk about the other men they had to beat up because the other men dissed them. "Dissing" could be anything from not getting another beer fast enough for a woman to looking at my girl for a man. They had no choice, they just had to hit. They used to obstruct the stairs and annoy my wife until I started doing martial arts practice on the balcony; they respect force. It is all part of the same mindset, and that mindset is indecency.

Once while walking back from the mailbox, I found myself behind two girls about fourteen years old. They were discussing what to do in case they got in a fight with another girl. The best strategy is to hit her in a place that would mean a lot to a girl even though it might not cause much physical damage, such as the face or the breasts. If you wear a ring and can threaten to cut her face, that attack is better. I know the need for smart strategic self-defense but that is not what they were talking about. What they were talking about is not just a juvenile phase; it is an indecent attitude toward people and social life.

Compulsive lying is indecent and it teaches indecency. My wife and I own an old Camry as our only car. While my wife was moving slowly through the parking lot on her way to work, a woman in a big Mercedes Benz sedan (unusual here) backed into my wife and dented the car. In the Benz with the woman were her two teenage daughters. The woman looked at us straight faced and claimed that my wife had run into her car while the woman was trying to back out. This was an obvious lie. It blatantly violated physics. I looked at her daughters as she told this lie, and saw that they were learning an important lesson about how to handle people and life. Someday compulsive lying will come back to haunt that woman just as stupid dogma and enabling indecency comes back to haunt the greater society. White lies make sense but lying, especially, compulsive lying, is indecent.

Everybody has seen movies where a person gets on a bus or subway to see obnoxious punks sprawled out on the seats, taking up too many seats, their legs blocking the aisle, blasting loud music out of boom boxes. This has happened to me on public buses. This is not just juvenile acting out. Usually the next scene in the movie has the punks robbing little old ladies. It is important to get the motives straight. The punks are not protesting social conventions such as sitting upright in chairs with your legs together and straightforward, like girls trying to protect their virginity. They are not asserting freedom to relax. They are assaulting other people in a context in which they can get away with it and in which they other people cannot avoid. It is deliberate assault. That is how the sprawling and noise leads to robbery in the next scene and in real life.

When I was young, we called "mooning" somebody "hanging a BA (bare ass)". Hanging a BA clearly is a form of mild sexual assault. It is more than just "acting out" by wearing a bandana or getting a fake tattoo. It is more tolerable than heavily groping somebody at a concert but the motive is similar. It is important to see the true underlying motive, and most people who moon, or get mooned, see the underlying motive of mild sexual assault even if they can't say it. Saying "moon" instead of "bare ass" hides the deep motive and makes the act seem like mere chic naughtiness. I think the fashion of wearing your pants below your

butt, and exposing your underwear and butt, came from making fun of old White men in Florida and California. That is why the young men who do it wear boxer shorts, and, of course, they don't want to get arrested. By now, most young men don't recall why it started, and have other motives. Like sprawling on a bus, you have to get the motives straight. The young men say it is part of their fashion, part of their world. They know hanging your butt out makes a statement but can't always say what statement. The statement is a form of sexual assault, like hanging a BA or mooning. The young men are really sticking their butts out at the big world beyond their own little world. They get away with it by wearing the boxers that are part of the outfit. The same is true of young women who wear their pants or skirt so that about half their butt crack shows, and wear a thong to make the display more striking. It is like a baboon in heat showing her big red swollen butt. It is a form of sexual assault that a woman can get away with. Women are usually the victims of assault, so maybe we can have sympathy for wanting to turn the tables. But that doesn't make the display tasteful. It doesn't make the display less sexual assault, and, like bikers, it is odd to perpetrate on other people just the assault that you hate getting. It is funny that boys who wear their pants down are showing off their butt like a girl in heat or like a desperate gay man in a bathhouse yet thinking they are fierce because they assault.

If you see a dead cat by the side of the road, you can look away. If you smell the dead cat, in a few yards the smell goes away. If you touch a piece of fruit and find it is rotten and slimy, you can pull away your hand. You don't have to taste anything you don't like. But if a big fire breaks out in a factory in the next block, you will hear the noise of the fire, sirens, and explosions regardless. When a big freight train goes by, you can turn your head but you can't stop the rumble. Sound is the sense that is hardest to avoid. I understand not being able to listen to loud music in your apartment, thus getting into your car for a drive and a quick fix. I understand when somebody drives around with the radio on, and other people can hear it from a few feet away; it is even fun if he-she is listening to something good like R&B. I don't accept obnoxious people who drive around in rolling boom boxes shaking tall buildings. Get into a car like that someday. You don't really hear music, you feel vibration. The content is irrelevant compared to the thrill you get from just blasting crap. The people who do it are not interested in an aesthetic experience. They are assaulting the world in the only way they can get away with and the one way the world cannot get away from. The point is not music but assault. They might not be able to understand all the words while they are in the car but nearly everybody else within a block can, so usually the words are racial slurs or sexist slurs. I don't like being assaulted.

I tried teaching martial arts at a local civic recreation center. Sometimes old people across the hall did square dancing. They were loud but they were loud because they honestly had hearing issues, and they turned down the volume if you asked. More often, a woman taught a type of vigorous exercise dance across the hall. Although her class had only half-a-dozen students, she brought gigantic speakers and blasted brain-numbing music that rattled the building. Once I asked her to turn it down, and told her that it was too loud. She exploded. She screamed at me for about five minutes, and then followed me down the hall for a bit more. Her voice was as much a verbal assault as her music, and as much of an assault as she could muster up without getting arrested. Although she seemed to say she would assault me physically (I couldn't tell), she didn't. She was not giving a course in life-giving exuberance, she was assaulting the center and all the people in it. She was taking the place over and dominating all the people who allowed. She is no different than people who drive around in cars blasting music about rape and racial hatred or who stick their ass in our faces.

In the South, when a person wants to get off a road, he-she speeds up, jams ahead of the car in front of his-her car, and careens off the exit or into the turn. Hundreds of times, while driving in the right lane of a highway, I have approached an exit ramp, with nobody behind me in my lane for half-a-mile, when suddenly an ass zooms over from the left lane, dives in front of me, and screams over to the exit ramp by cutting me off. He-she never looked to see that behind me the lane was open. If he-she had looked, he-she probably wouldn't have cared, and would have done the same thing anyway. I have asked people in the South if this is so, they confirm it, and admit they have done it, to their embarrassment. This cultural habit might be funny except I have also seen dozens of cars crashed off exit ramps. The problem is attitude and safety. These drivers are playing out a little social drama in their head and are willing to impose on themselves and others the results. People cannot succeed by succeeding well enough, they have to get ahead, they have to make sure others stay behind, and they have to make sure they come in first. If you can't do that in real life, you can do it on the road in your car. As a result, not only do they die but far too often they take innocent people with them.

Everybody still knows "keeping up with the Joneses" and most people still strive to do it no matter what they say. I get it – I dislike it intensely, but I get. That is not the indecency. The indecency is the feeling of entitlement that goes along with it now. The feeling shows up clearly in the modern version of keeping up with the Joneses because we can see the cars, houses, clothes, and lessons but the feeling is much bigger now than just keeping up with the Joneses. We feel entitled to have it all, to have it our way, and this is indecent. Even people who have only average talent and education at best still feel entitled. In striving and conniving to get it all, they are happy to push themselves ahead of their talent, push other people down, and twist the laws and economy to their advantage. You deserve this, you deserve that, and you are special. I do not list the details. On public television, Tiger Woods said that a feeling of entitlement led him to cheat on his wife not just with one or two women but dozens. Tiger Woods has great talent, and should not have to worry. If a feeling of entitlement drove him to that kind of ruin, it does worse, but in smaller ways, to people with lesser talent.

If you stood in the middle of a burning house, but you could still open the refrigerator door to get a cool refreshing bottle of soda, would you stop to get it and drink it in the middle of the flame filled kitchen, while not calling the fire department and not saving your family? Hopefully you would have better sense. Americans get angry when other people criticize our lifestyle as selfish and indulgent. If our lifestyle were only selfish and indulgent yet did not harm a world that was badly in trouble, I would not care. Some Americans insist they have a right to big houses, multiple big cars, huge electric bills, and a lot of wasted food because, through some honest enterprise and too much conniving, America can run a huge energy budget and some Americans can afford luxuries. We are in a world that cannot support our lifestyles, that is, we are in a burning house next to the refrigerator sipping soda watching our family burn. In this case, it is not just self-indulgent, it is stupid and indecent. You have to think seriously about where to draw the line between what you deserve as a result of hard work in a technologically rich society versus what you take from a world burning around you. At some point, selfishness really does become indecency.

I recall listening to scientists who knew better, but made their money through contracts with business, finding every excuse they could to deny global climate change (global warming). It was really sad to see smart people contort their minds. To a scientist, the evidence was clear a couple of decades ago. Even to a jingoist politician, they evidence has been clear for about a decade. To deny global climate change is not just selfish, it is now indecent, no matter what your party says or your constituents say.

I see why, in the pre-modern world, families might have six, eight, or ten children. I know why, even now, in places with uncertain life, couples want more than two children. But the world can't afford it anymore. It is not just China, India, and Indonesia that are packed full. The whole world is packed full. People in modern states such as America, France, and China don't see the extent to which everybody supports their children and all the children of the country. American children go to school not just on their parents' dime but through the good-hearted support of neighbors including old people, childless people, childless couples, the poor, the rich, and business firms. Sales taxes are used to finance education. Although Americans know how much a child costs them in particular, they still do not fully appreciate how much a child costs overall and how much of the cost is borne by other people. The world is now overcrowded. The world carries at least twice, likely at least three times, as many people as it can support. In these conditions, it is indecent to have more than two children unless you personally make ALL the money, and can command ALL the resources, that it takes to raise ALL of your present and additional children, and are willing to give to the public pot. Few people really command that much in resources and even few are willing to give a big share. If you cannot afford all the costs of a child, then don't have one. If you are a woman, and you have a child to hold a man but cannot afford to raise the child alone, you have done something indecent and destructive. If you are a man and do not fully support your wives and children, then you are indecent. If you have a congenital disease such as diabetes, don't have children. If you are fat, don't have children. If you have children that you know will be a burden to society as a whole and to the world as a whole, you are indecent.

The point of the following is not that welfare mothers are indecent. Some are, and some aren't. The average welfare mother has the same number of children, about two, as the average mother who is not on welfare. The minority of women on welfare are welfare queens, although some are. The point is that welfare has become a kind of blackmail, and the blackmail is indecent.

Conversation overheard in a large retail store: One middle age lady to another middle age lady: "(A) I'll be really glad when my daughter has her fourth child soon. (B) Why is that? (C) Because then she will get welfare payments for all four children and everybody in the house will be able to live good enough. (B) Who's the daddy of this one? Same as the last? Don't he have to pay child support? (A) The daddy is that no-good Howard, but we aint gonna tell the welfare people, and he aint the father of none of the others. Don't know where their daddies are and their daddies wouldn't pay no child support anyhow."

Suppose a woman has a first child and cannot take care of it or will not take care of it. She is a bad person, and we don't want to reward her. But, by withholding help from her, we also withhold help from her child. We don't want the child to be hungry, sick, unclothed, cold, and unable to learn. Even if the child survives, he-she is more likely to be a criminal or a burden. So we take care of the child. In taking care of the child, we support the mother, even if she is a bad person. Bad people quickly enough catch on to this blackmail racket, and milk it for what they can get. The bad people spoil it not just for the kind people who give support but for all the other good mothers who really deserve help, like a thirty year old mother with two kids and used to work hard but lost her job. The fact that the blackmail inherent in the situation often goes to support bad people makes the feeling of blackmail much sharper but the feeling of blackmail taints everything anyway and would taint everything even if nobody on welfare abuses welfare. The fact that we feel blackmailed even when we help good people makes us feel angrier and taints the situation worse. The fact that we can't separate the good people from the bad people without hurting a lot

of children makes it worse again. Everyone who does not take care of his-her own children when he-she could supports indecency. Everyone who does not plan ahead for situations like losing a job before he-she has children supports indecency. Everyone who has another child while on welfare, or soon after welfare, is indecent. Everyone who gets off welfare to have another child and then goes back on welfare is indecent. Everyone who lashes out against all welfare mothers without understanding where his-her own anger comes from, even if some anger is quite justified, is indecent. Everyone who supports welfare without understanding the blackmail, the taint, and the justifiable anger of people, is indecent even if he-she thinks of him-herself as good-hearted. Everyone who criticizes critics of welfare without seeing the blackmail at the heart of the system, and without feeling the heart of critics, is indecent.

Contrary to myth, education will not solve all social problems. In particular, education alone will not make sure everybody gets a job. I do strongly support education, and I want everybody to get some education so they will be a better member of society and better citizen. My view is not a contradiction but it is not straightforward, so I need to be clear. I live among families with children, so I have had a chance to hear and see school children. Many children disparage other children who like to read, like to play music, like sports other than football and basketball, and like activities other than cheerleading and dancing. Children learn to disparage a decent well-rounded education. Kids who get something from school, and who enjoy school, are called “geeks” and “Chinese”. Children learn to disparage school not only from other children as part of overall kids’ culture but they learn it from their parents too, who do not value education. Even though education alone won’t solve all social problems, we have to value education. It has to be a part of American culture. We have to be realistic about what to expect from it – again, it is not the cure for everything - but we do have to expect something from education and we do have to value it in itself. To disparage education in the modern world is indecent. To encourage or tolerate your children disparaging education and well-rounded educated children is indecent.

The eastside of Montgomery, Alabama was largely ruined by teens who formed packs at the shopping malls, stole, fought, terrorized other shoppers, and ruined business. The east side of the city today looks like a neighborhood in Syria. Montgomery built a large new shopping mall on the west side of the city. The teen gangs started going there, shoppers got worried, and merchants got worried. One day, a little old Black lady, who was active in her community, went to the mall and started yelling at the children to behave themselves. The police and the merchants supported her. As far as I could tell, the parents of the children were nowhere. The city instituted a curfew and rules about how many people could gather at once. So far, it all seems to have worked, and the malls remain open and prosperous. I don’t think I need to point out what is decent and indecent, and the motives of the merchants and city. It is useful to point out that indecency does have some really bad effects.

When the Western pension system was devised, people lived to be only about 60 years old, many people lived only into their forties, and people stuck with a job all their lives. People expected to get only one pension from one place, and employers expected to pay only one pension for one job for one lifetime of a worker. Pensions were set up so the majority of benefits could be claimed after about 20 years of work because that might be all the years that one worker worked lived, and his-her family needed the security after he-she died. Back before about 1980, America could afford to be generous like this to its workers. Although people could get most benefits after about 20 years, employers expected them to work for at least 30 years if they lived. Today people live much longer than 60. People start a job early expecting to put in 20 years at that job, quit, get nearly full benefits, then move to another job and do the same. Some

people do that with three jobs, and then get Disability or Social Security too. Not only do they get benefits from multiple sources, they get benefits for a lot longer than the plans originally were set up to cover. So, for a long time they drain resources from other people who are still working. While they might be legally and technically justified, they are not morally justified. Being clever and using the law does not make a person correct. These people are no more correct than the corporations who use the law and are clever. This is like abusing welfare and has the same feel about it as welfare blackmail. This is indecent. These people should be working to reform the pension system so that one person, and family, gets one pension per lifetime.

A “corp” is a “body”, a unified group (of people), as in “esprit de corps”. A corporation is an imaginary body, that is, an imaginary legal person. A corporation is an imaginary person made up so that a group of people can work together as a whole under the law just as a single person can work as a unit under the law. If not abused, it is a good idea. One of the most annoying rumors spread by foes of homosexual (gay) marriage is that, if a person can marry another person of the same gender, then soon people will be marrying a dog, cat, horse, rose, rhododendron, house, spirit, or something equally bizarre and offensive. In novels about Mississippi, William Faulkner had an idiot White Trash man in love with a cow. People needlessly fear this abuse of gay marriage but they do not need-fully fear the abuse done by made up legal powerful persons, that is, corporations. It is fine to give corporations some rights as a person so they can be overall useful to society as long as they are not a threat to real flesh-and-blood-and-spirit persons. It is not fine to give corporations rights under the law that undercut social welfare and the idea of a real person. Sadly, that has begun in America, and it is indecent. It is indecent in itself, and is more indecent because it is done to serve the power of the rich and powerful, including corporations. “LLC” used to be part of the name of many corporations. The letters mean “Limited Liability Corporation or Company”. Due to the laws about corporations, it is harder to sue a corporation than a regular person, a corporation cannot be sued for some things for which we can sue a normal person, and, even if a corporation is sued, the extent of liability is limited. This privilege was originally given to corporations so they could do business without many nuisance lawsuits and worries, so corporations would benefit the country as a whole. Now the law serves as a shield behind which corporations can do bad things. In a specific provision of the law set up by George W. Bush and Dick Cheney to enable the harvest of natural gas, corporations that “frack” for natural gas cannot be sued. Oklahoma used to have 2 earthquakes a year before fracking there. In 2013, it had 230. The good Republicans of Oklahoma who voted for Bush and Cheney might want to re-consider. It is hard to see how a corporation can have a political position as a real person can have. Yet the Supreme Court in 2014 gave corporations the right to donate almost without limit to campaigns, and allowed officers of corporations the right to assess workers over political views. It would be little surprise if, soon, corporations had the right to marry each other, marry physical things such as dams, or marry natural things such as rivers. That would certainly help consolidate business. The abuse of personhood by corporations is indecent while the use of marriage by gay people is not.

I don't mind ads for dentists on TV although the dentists who run ads are no better than the dentists who do not run ads. I used to not mind ads for lawyers until lawyers started running ads offering to sue the drug companies in case of any drug that might have bad side effects, one day after the FDA expressed any concern, and implying that anyone who ever took the drug, with side effects or not, “might be entitled to a large cash settlement”. The key is entitlement without talent, training, or effort. Lawyers pander to the idea that we are all entitled, and there is a magic legal doorway by which we can get ours, and get it

big. The indecency is divided equally between the mass of people who hope to live easily by winning a lawsuit and the lawyers who will sell their services based on mass greed.

I thought I could avoid skewering political practices but, as I wrote this, I had to live through Republican Primary elections and runoffs in Alabama and Georgia. Out of 100 ads, about 5 might be positive ads, the content of which pretty much just featured the candidate with his family at church or at home to show what a good decent guy he was – no ideas or policies. The other 95 ads were attacks on the opponent. In a nutshell, despite being a lifelong Republican, the opponent really is a Democratic Party demon in disguise, in secret collusion with the Teachers' Union and President Obama to take away all your guns and money, force your children to learn about evolution and hate God, and give your money to the same slime that now get welfare. In fairness, when Democrats get their turn, they are as bad. If any of these claims were true, we would have to put up with the practice. But it is all completely made up lies. If any statements were about real positions, issues, and laws, then we might have to think about it. But every message is about only fantasies and fears. The Republicans all claimed to be good religions Christian people, yet they lied, and Jesus would condemn them for lying. The worst part is that it works. Politicians invest in these lies because the lies work. People respond to this crap, and do not respond to real issues as real citizens should. This shows why Americans no longer deserve the freedom for which our soldiers are dying. The practice of politicians is indecent, and their indecency reveals something about Americans that is even more deeply indecent.

Every occupation in the modern world is part of a system. Every system has its quirks, and everybody uses the quirks now and then. Everybody takes a paper clip home sometimes. I don't care about that. On the other hand, every system has people who are adept at milking the system. They use resources of the system for their own good. They divert the system away from what it should be doing, and so deprive other people of the help they should have gotten. That is indecent.

Because I was in academia for a while, I saw indecent abuse mostly among professors. I don't know if academia is worse than other lines such as construction and computers and if some professors are worse than some people in other lines. Academia encourages abuse among professors but I don't want to blame the system. People have to take personal responsibility. The professors that I have in mind are adept at writing papers and books with little content or they repeatedly re-cycle ideas that were original twenty years ago. They are adept at writing grants that seem topical and seem as if the work will produce an advance in knowledge or in practical application but really doesn't. They know how to write a grant for any piece of money that comes up almost anywhere. If they are in the right field, they know how to attract money from business often by putting a pseudo-scientific jingle behind what business wants to hear. They support a team of students who do all the real work in exchange for degrees. The work of the team might have some benefits but not nearly as much as it seems. These professors get themselves called "stars" and so get salaries higher than their fellows, like a star in athletics – but usually not as much as the football coach. In their hearts they know they are not worth it, and know the distortion they cause, but they can't help it. The equivalent in politics might be a veteran legislator who is adept at stabbing pork into every bill that has a little life. He-she knows how to get re-elected and knows glamour issues but doesn't know, or care, what the country really needs. All this is no different than someone who indecently abuses welfare or Social Security Disability. They have good excuses too.

In a democracy, being a bad citizen is indecent. Voting without knowing the issues is indecent. Voting on the basis of party alone, ethnic group, or religion is indecent. People should consider why they want to help groups such as illegal immigrants. Many people within our country, such as the residents of Chicago and Los Angeles, live in conditions worse than the previous conditions of illegal immigrants. Should we help illegal immigrants from China as much as from Latin America? Should we spend resources helping illegal immigrants of particular races and creeds or should we spend resources on the people of our own cities regardless of race and creed? People must think about why they support breaking the law in some particular cases.