

2015 03 05

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Intellectual Biography

This note is an intellectual biography of sorts. This note relates how I was blocked mentally for most of my life and how I got over it. Now I am happier and more productive. In a story like this, the author comes off either as an excusing narcissist or naïve idiot. I hope for idiot. Don't read this note if you are not interested in me personally, can't tolerate introspection, or can't stand the pronoun "I".

If I had been born into a world without deep social problems, I would have been a mathematician and physical scientist. But I was born into a world with deep social problems. Intellectually, I can figure out the problems and what might be done. The trick is getting people to act well enough. For that, I am at a total loss, it really gets to me, and I can't shake it.

The core problem is that simplistic populist democracy cannot work. Human nature is not good enough for populist democracy. Democracy is sacred, it is our only hope, but we cannot make it work. Because democracy cannot work well enough, we cannot deal with other serious problems: material well-being, fairness, workable capitalism, caring for nature, discrimination, education, depending on the state, crime, and the world economy.

I knew all this as a child, but, due to my upbringing, I was committed to democracy and to believing that together human nature and democracy can be good enough. I was in a bind. Normal people in binds just step out and carry on. I couldn't do that. Like HAL in "2001", I went a bit crazy. When issues overcame me, I shut down. When I tried to avoid issues, I shut down. I stayed in the cycle for decades but finally did get out by giving up populist democracy. In giving up on populist democracy, I did not become a right-wing reactionary. This note is not about the failure of populist democracy or what to do but about how I hurt myself and how I got out of the trap.

I omit much mention of my wife Nitaya ("Nit-ah-yah" or "Nit") and of any friends because it takes too long to describe all the good things they gave me.

SOME USEFUL DATES

1949 Born in Portland, Oregon

1967 – 1968 Pomona College

1969 – 1970 University of Oregon, waiting for Selective Service resolution

1970 – 1971 Alternative service in Oakland, California

1972 – 1973 Multnomah County Hospital, taking specimens

1973 – 1976 University of Oregon. BA Anthropology

1976 – 1977 Harvard University, MA Anthropology

1977 – 1980 University of Michigan

1981 – 1983 Fieldwork in Southern Thailand

1984 – 1989 University of Michigan, PhD Anthropology

1990 – 1995 Ohio University Assistant Professor
 1995 – 1996 Fulbright in Southern Thailand
 1996 – 2000 Various fieldwork in Southern Thailand
 2000 – 2012 Research assistant at Auburn University in Auburn, AL
 2005 Continuous fieldwork in Western Alabama
 2005 Begin working again on my projects
 2008 Book: “First Book in Economics”
 2011 Book: “Jesus for Most People”
 2014 Book: “Religious Stances”

THE CORE PROBLEMS RESTATED

First, again, in particular, the focus here: Democracy is absolutely sacred but democracy has failed.

People are wonderful in most ways, entertaining, usually kind, and often competent at work. The human world usually is more joy than heartache. But the average person is not up to citizenship in a democracy in the modern world. The average person, especially with a decent education, might have been up to the challenge of democracy before about 1929 when the world was simpler; but not now. Now the average person cannot handle the problems, and education has not made us able. Even if education improved, it would not make the average person an adept citizen.

Even in the United States, democracy has failed. America was never a full democracy and cannot be. America is one of the few democracies that come close to success, so the rest of the world is worse. We have tried many ways to avoid the problems of bad self-management but none has worked. America has been openly failing since at least 1981. The failure of the people to live up to good citizenship betrays the sanctity of democracy.

Second, is an even bigger concern, but one I don't bring it up again here. I state it for perspective, to get past it, so as to move back to the main subject here. Humanity and the Earth will persist but neither will persist in grace, decency, dignity, beauty, or freedom. God made people through evolution, and intended good. We are basically good. But we are not good enough. We are not often bad on purpose; we are just not up to the job now. Over-population, resource use, and abuse of nature, all mean it is already too late. Nature will wither to stubble. The large majority of people will live like third world drones in concrete hives rather than like current American suburbanites. Wealthy people will have more stuff but will not live well. They will hide behind walls fooling themselves. We could have succeeded but we “blew it”. All this is a cosmic tragedy.

The grade-school civics simplistic solution to the problem of democracy is that democracy might not be a good form of government but it is still better than the rest and it is good enough. Democracy fumbles its way toward full solutions to all problems, like Harry Potter hunting horcruxes or Spiderman seeing how to defeat a villain whose powers exceed his. Even if miraculous democratic solutions are not ideal, they still preserve freedom, grace, decency, and dignity. All is wishful thinking. It is an excuse for every ignorant Tina-Dick-and-Sally to misrule. We need not revert to king or dictator. We could have democracy that is better than what we have now and that takes into account real human nature. But we won't. I know the

literature in political science that is skeptical about democracy. My problem with democracy is not on that intellectual level, it is at the level of guts and spirit.

The problem of democracy forcibly brings out inadequate human nature because it removes all excuses. We the people made our fate. We can no longer blame anybody else, no socio-economic class, religion, dogma, gender, age group, ethnic group, economic system, environment, enemy, devil, or God. We can only blame ourselves.

Given impending failure, the question is not “Why should we be moral and work hard for a better world? Why not just find a secure niche for personal and family success?” The question is “How do we act well given that we will fail at what is sacred?” This question is at the heart of every good detective story since about 1920: How to be moral in an immoral and amoral world? There is no smart answer. You just have to try anyway.

The first time I recall grasping these issues, I was about eleven years old. I knew we needed a different system that could work with a more realistic vision of human nature, but we were not allowed. I spent the next forty-five years alternately wrestling with secondary problems such as poverty and sexism, and then shutting down when I couldn’t get anywhere. Experience finally led me to accept my childish intuition as the truth, and then get on with things.

Advances in biotechnology and artificial intelligence will radically change the setting for these problems and probably eliminate them as they are now. In the near future, human nature will be different and we will not have to worry about democracy. Then why not stop worrying now and just get on with life, with something more attuned to the future? Because we need to get clear if we are to have the right kind of future. If we are not clear, the future could be worse. Decades will pass before we have a new nature and institutions. In the meantime, people suffer and nature dies. Even after giving up on the main issue of democracy and human nature, it is still worth working on secondary issues such as population, poverty, nature, and prejudice. I intend to go down fighting.

MY CULTURE AND CHARACTER

I grew up in these cultures: self-reliant working class; self-reliant small business; Oregon version of Western America; and Cretan Greeks. All this together, I call “Oregon”. My Oregon culture was shaped by people from Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, and Arkansas. All contributors to Oregon are staunchly individualistic, egalitarian, self-reliant, anti-authority, anti-intellectual, and anti-institution. As everywhere, since I was young, Oregon has changed. How it changed doesn’t matter for here.

In the original Oregon outlook, all institutions are necessarily inherently corrupt. Institutions might work well enough to get by sometimes, but they are still corrupt, and institutions necessarily corrupt all people in them. If possible, avoid institutions. If you must participate, keep wary. You will be corrupted if you stay close. Official authority comes from institutions. The more authority a person has, the more he-she is tied to an institution, the more corrupt he-she is, and the more likely he-she will corrupt you. Distrust and avoid authority.

Even without secondary problems of capitalism, racism, etc., democracy is an institution and so presents an unsolvable contradiction. On the one hand, democracy should lead the fight against the corruption of institutions and authority. Democracy should be the paradigm super-institution. Democracy is the closest institutional expression we can have to good human nature in action, so, if human nature can prevail and defeat evil, it should prevail and defeat evil through democracy, and only that way. On the other hand, democracy is an institution too, and so is necessarily corrupt. Elected authorities, and their appointees, are corrupt. Even supposed good guys are corrupt. Democracy has “co-opted” itself. The way to save democracy should be strong populist democracy, that is, even more democracy, yet even that way seems to have been co-opted and corrupted.

People who feel this bind tend to have a classic “trouble with authority populist rebel” personality. When romanticized, they are a stock character of American adventure. I was never the rebel version of this stock personality; I was always more the nerd version; more like Lisa than Bart. My personality is a bit like the Appalachian stereotype. This person has trouble with academia, and academics have trouble with this kind of person.

I became a cultural cliché, and stayed true to the cliché until I imploded. Looking back, I am proud of being true to my roots, being stubborn, and showing grit. But I am also sorry for the pain I caused myself and others, and I am sorry I was able to do so little good.

To see clearly about democracy and human nature, I had to contradict all that I had learned as a child. I had to accept a view of human nature that was not compatible with the idea that democracy and human nature could rescue each other. I had to build, and then accept, an alternative view of human nature and institutions. That took time.

Here I need to make two points that will be important later. First, just because I think human nature is not up to democracy in the modern world does not mean I think the solution is a bigger more powerful state. Second, it is usually better when people handle issues on their own at a low level. Farmers should deal with farming, teachers and parents with school, parents and the local police with local crime, etc. Only if people practice handling their own problems can they learn how to run a big state, and learn when to call in the state or leave it out.

OTHER RELEVANT PERSONALITY QUIRKS

On the one hand, I can see and assess the situations of other people. I can see when other good people are plagued by a bad person, and can guess what to do. I recognize bad people when I don't deal with them personally. On the other hand, I am a “deer in the headlights” when it comes to me. I feel when people act well around me, and I like to give people credit for being good. I assume people around me are saints until they prove otherwise. I cannot see when somebody acts badly to me, takes advantage of me, and hurts me. I just don't believe people really would act badly to me until a hammer falls on my head. I have been cheated out of money, once a large sum when I had little. I had people take my ideas for their papers or grants. I don't know why I see double. I know I conform to a type but that still does not let me be smarter about myself.

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

This section is in the essay because I recently (2011 and 2015) finished books on religion. My behavior with religion might be part of a neurological syndrome in which people focus on religious experiences and people write a lot. I had to work through religious issues to clear my mind. Writing the two books was a huge help. Writing about religion was a good way to work down to the basic questions of human nature, what it can do, and can't do.

I am not religious compared to people who go to church, pursue Zen, or are militant atheists. I do not go to church, mostly because I am lazy, but I also think there are better ways for me personally to serve God. Other people can serve in their ways. I am comfortable in church and with churchy people; I love it when they say grace at meals; but I do not seek it out.

I was an altar boy at a Greek Orthodox Church for maybe a dozen Sundays in total over a couple years when I was young. That had almost no effect. When I was about twelve, I had a paper route, and so some income. Someone at the Multnomah County Fair swindled me into buying a set of encyclopedias; with them came a big beautiful Roman Catholic bible. Wanting to get full value for my precious money, I read that Bible all straight through. In doing so, I internalized Jewish monotheism. Jesus was the best person I ever read about. His morality is wonderful. Yet, having read the Tanakh (Old Testament) first, I doubted Jesus was God when I got to the New Testament. I knew Christian dogma so I knew my doubts were heresy, but I didn't care much. I saw that a mind was behind it all, that mind is God, and God sent us people like Jesus. I stuck to those ideas all my life. My ideas are not new.

Jesus said that, the more you have, the more you have to give. If you have wealth, power, talent, or time, you have to use those well, and you have to use them as much as you can, in public service. If you have intelligence and insight, you have to use those, in public service. I have to put myself in situations where I can use my intelligence and insight to the full extent in public service. I have to avoid situations where I cannot put my talents to good use or where my talents are subverted. As I learned, academia and simple populist democracy are both traps for me in this regard.

In adolescence, I read a lot about psychology and various religions, so I tended to dismiss religion as do most young pseudo-intellectuals. I enjoyed reading about religions. I never got over the ideas that there was a God behind it all, Jesus said what was important, and we have to do what we can.

None of this mattered much until I did field work after 1981. I had spent most of my adult life in academia. In academia, you are silly if you accept God or accept the importance of Jesus. In academia, religion is mostly a game, even atheism. The struggle I had with the military draft (see below) reinforced the idea of God and importance of Jesus. In the real world, religion matters. Thailand has many true Buddhists, and the American South, where I live now, is famous for strong believers. I had to think through what I really believed, why, and what I should do about it.

Superficially, my pessimism about democracy and human nature resembles the pessimism in the bleak Christian and Muslim idea of a fallen world; the pessimism of Hinduism and Buddhism; or the disdain of some Taoists. My pessimism differs. Those people think humans could not have made in any case, and that normal human life is not worthwhile. I think sentient life could make it but will not fully make it under populist democracy on planet Earth, might make it on another planet, and might even make it here after

changes from biotechnology and artificial intelligence; and life is usually worthwhile even on a planet that does not make it. Human nature is not intrinsically spoiled but it can go bad, and stay bad, under the right conditions. The universe is not fallen. Christians tried to force my bad feelings about the world into their stereotype of a fallen world. They tried to make me like them. I dislike that. This conflict also helped me focus, and made me feel even more skeptical about organized religion.

ME AND ACADEMIA

Disappointment with academia and disappointment with democracy are similar and reinforce each other. One of the biggest reasons I could not get out of my trap for so long is because it played out in academia. One of the biggest helps in getting out of my trap was getting out of academia for long stretches. Now I see academia more clearly and appreciate it more.

What I say here is about academia in general. Individual academics are about as good as most people, and are kind and generous as individuals. They have a sense of morality and they enjoy rising above. But the drift of academia does not go that way. In the terms of the cultures in which I grew up, academics don't feel honored enough, especially given their privileges. As the wise man Norman Gross used to say, quoting buddies from the radiator shop, "the smaller the pit, the fiercer the rat".

Academia clouds thinking. Academia lets you think you are doing something important when really you serve yourself. To clear your thinking, often you have to get away from academia. These people were not academics, and would never have done what they did if they were: Socrates, Galileo, Locke, Hume, Spinoza, Newton, Euler, Gauss, Darwin, and Einstein.

Academia clouds thinking partly because it is hypocritical. All occupations have some hypocrisy but most are not too bad: police, retailers, builders, MMA fighters. In contrast, academia suffers from a sharp kind of hypocrisy typical of professions that should work for truth and public welfare but the "professors" live well and do not always add to truth and general welfare: medicine, politics, law, and, in America, the arts. While supposedly giving up income to find truth and help us, in fact academics are dedicated careerists who do well. Academics find a niche of personal success. The nuances of hypocrisy in social sciences shaped how I reacted but there is no point here in going into the details.

Even the hypocrisy of academia would not be a big issue if it did not lead academics to fool themselves and to divert themselves away from issues, if academic hypocrisy was not also a bad trap. To live with them, you have to live like them so much that it changes you.

Academia clouds thinking partly because it is so seductive. Sometimes academia really does do some good. You can think you serve the truth and humanity just by doing your job. Academia is among those deluding activities that let us think we serve something greater, and do some good, even while really we serve ourselves most, like religious leader and TV political commentator. When you publish a paper, you can think you have really done something, more than when a police officer writes a ticket, a lawyer sets up a will, a fighter wins a match, or an automaker builds a car. I was especially susceptible to this ability of academia to cloud thinking.

Some of the hypocrisy in academia is imposed by society. To make sure people don't fail in the modern economy, education has been "dumbed down". Grades are badly inflated. Quality is a distant priority. Professors who succeed in academia can deal with all this; their personality fits careerism-with-minimum-content. Going along with twisting education was the price professors gladly paid for a secure job. I could not deal with this situation. I disliked all of it.

The hypocrisy of academia, combined with its seduction, leads to hypocrisy about yourself. On the one hand, you know you are not doing what you should be doing, and that you benefit yourself while you say you are serving truth and other people. On the other hand, it feels good, and you want to keep on doing it. It's like popping pills. To live this way, you have to hide what is going on from yourself, hide a part of yourself from yourself. Hiding from your situation and yourself creates stress.

Everybody has faults and inadequacies that fuel self-doubt and the problems that come with self-doubt. I had all the self-doubts of both a nerdy man growing up in anti-intellectual America and a working class kid among the elite. My confusion over democracy and academia fed that. The two feelings intensified each other. Confusion feeds self-doubt, and self-doubt feeds confusion.

When you feel confused and bad about yourself, you take it out by blaming the people and institutions around you, then by blaming yourself more, and so on. As Groucho Marx said, "I wouldn't join a club that would take me as a member". I had some of that. I felt bad about myself, blamed academia, blamed myself more for thinking badly about democracy and academia, and so on. People who hate themselves also hate their employers and fellow employees. Sometimes they go on killing sprees. Mostly they just drink too much booze. I did neither.

As I grew older, I saw that my bad feelings and faults were not what was really going on. My faults were only a small part of the problem. Democracy and academia really have their own problems even if I also have problems. I did not hate them as a way to hide hating myself. As Yossarian said in "Catch 22", just because you are paranoid doesn't mean there is no real problem and doesn't mean they aren't after you. The world has problems apart from your faults and insecurities, and often enough you are right about those despite your own failings.

It is natural to feel anger at hypocrisy and seduction, including your own hypocrisy. Yet anger can feed hypocrisy and seduction, anger is a trap in itself even if it does not feed hypocrisy and seduction, and it leads to other traps. I felt too much anger for too long. Besides issues with my self-esteem, democracy as an institution, and academia as an institution, I had to deal with anger. Dealing with anger taught me a lot about how people work and, in the long run, helped me to be better with people.

If I had succeeded in academia, especially, ironically, if I had done good work that had social value and gave me a niche, I could not have thought freely. I would have succumbed to seduction. I would have tried to be a "cool" professor and would have believed that my work was enough. I would have buried the contradictions. I would have fallen into a spiritual trap. I could not have thought about democracy and human nature. While young, I had already given up a lot to be free to think (see below), and I could not, as a young man, lose what I had won as a youth, simply to succeed in academia. To be free to think, I had to fail in academia despite succeeding there. That is not as crazy as it sounds but did lead to some

craziness. When I found myself falling into academia, I had to stop, get out, and get loose again. Usually that meant screwing up badly somehow.

I was born into failing populist democracy and was channeled into academia – as in the movie “The Breakfast Club”. For as long as I can recall, I was already in a situation that folds back on itself into a layered trap. I had to work on two fronts at once to make any progress on either front.

I am not sure what would have happened if I had not been so close to academia. I have lived and worked with non-academics, and I often think clearer then. I miss talking to academics and I miss people who can appreciate art and understand affairs. As I resolved issues, I saw other paths that I could have taken that would have allowed me to think freely while still earning dinner. It is easier to do that in 2015 than it was in 1967, 1980, or 1990. Yet, if I had made my living in another arena, likely I would never have found deeper truths. I doubt if I would have been better off if I had programmed computers, loaded trucks, or sold records.

After I got out of my traps, and could think clearly, then I felt at ease with academia, appreciated the good work that gets done there, and could overlook most hypocrisy. Academia is like the music business. It is mostly for self-serving careerists, driven by fads, thrives on repetition with slight variation, pumps out one-hit wonders, makes a lot of mediocre stuff, makes too much crap, lets people think they are “hot shit” and “free souls” when they are not, and is full of well-meaning slightly lost would-be artistes (intellectuals); but that is the only way we could get the Beatles, the Velvet Underground, young Bob Dylan, or Beethoven; and academia slowly builds lasting work.

SPECIFIC IMPORTANT SECONDARY PROBLEMS AS MISLEADING

I thought, by solving particular secondary problems such as race relations, we could solve deeper issues of democracy and human nature. I was wrong. It is the other way around. We can solve the secondary problems only if we first “get real” about democracy and human nature. We have tried to solve secondary problems my entire life and have made little progress.

I simply list well-known problems: unemployment, poor employment, poverty, racism, sexism, ageism, religion-ism, health care, destruction of cultures, dependence on energy, dependence on fossil fuels, abuse of nature, corporate welfare, abuse of aid programs such as welfare, using the state as a parent, aid to the rich, aid to the rich in the false name of promoting jobs, bad education at many levels, reverse discrimination, sustainable development, modernization, continual war, and terrorism. America has been at war all my life. Although Americans should value freedom, when they could “get on the government teat” they happily gave up their freedom, as individuals or business firms, well educated or illiterate, of all races, religions, and ideologies. The problems were compounded by a shift in American culture to the postures of victimization, dependency, whining, rights without responsibilities, and nasty vindictiveness that have prevailed since the 1970s. The problems were compounded by the Right Wing Reaction since the 1980s.

Once we accept that secondary problems are systemic and cannot be fully cured, we could treat the pain without making the problem much worse. This is doable. This would help preserve democracy rather than undermine it. Economists have long proposed workable ideas. Unemployment is endemic; deal

with it. We can have welfare and true national health insurance without distorting families, destroying the national budget, or adding more dependants of the state. We can promote research, development, and some economic growth without corporate welfare. We can stabilize the economy without mild fascism. Yet we have not sought better paths. We fail not because these problems defy all response but because simplistic democracy carried out by real human beings, using self-serving ideologies, does not allow us to deal with them.

Particular secondary problems gave me grief and caused me to shut down when I saw how stubborn they are. All my life, America has lived with poverty, lack of health care, homelessness, dependency on the state, and racial strife; we could have dealt with these issues decisively enough to make them livable; but we won't. All my life, America has been at war. All this is sad.

SHUTTING DOWN

Rather than try to describe personal shutdown, I suggest reading Emily Dickinson or reading Jerry West's biography (2011) that tells about his depression. Shutting down is rough.

I have medical conditions that add to shutdown, for example, allergies and not sleeping. The conditions are in my genes apart from other problems. The medical issues would present themselves even if I were otherwise perfectly happy. The medical issues are not merely bodily manifestations of unhappiness. Still, medical issues were tools that my deep self used for control. In this essay, I do not give details of my "conditions"; I do not "drop in to see what condition my condition is in". I use sleep as an index of how I was doing, and that only sparingly.

I could get away with shutting down, even for long times, because I can still deal with the world while shut down. Zombies still walk. I am smart enough to do well although five steps removed from daily life. That was not a good thing.

I shut down for two major reasons: First, because I wore out trying to face the issues. I got sick banging my head against insoluble problems. As long as I tried to make populist democracy work when it cannot work, inevitably I had to shut down sometimes. As long as I tried to solve secondary problems, such as the environment, without getting at deeper problem of human nature and self-government, I had to shut down sometimes.

Second, shutting down to me is like what Socrates' demon was to him. I shut down to force myself away from anything that might divert me away from focusing on core issues. I shut down as a way to force myself back to core issues. I loved various intellectual, artistic, and sports pursuits. But, if I got too far into any activity, I shut down. Down deep, hidden from daily awareness, I saw any interest, any pleasure, as a diversion into another path away from core issues. I saw commitment to any institution as a diversion from problems, and so shut down whenever I felt I was falling into any institution, no matter how much I liked my job there, how much good the job did, or how much my wife and I might need a job: no academia, schools, success, NGOs, consulting, World Bank projects, activism, farmer associations, etc.

Shutting down only succeeds if it hides itself. If I knew I was shutting down because of the contradiction in populist democracy, I could have dealt with the situation directly. If I knew I was shutting down to keep

myself away from distractions, I could have dealt with the situation directly. I had to not know why I was shutting down. I stayed in the twilight for a long time. I could not have said what I have said in this note until the 2000s. The fact that shutting down hides itself, and the facts of academic hypocrisy, reinforce each other. Hiding big issues and strong forces from yourself is seriously unhealthy.

So I bounced between shutting down to get away from issues and shutting down to stick to issues, all the time hiding both poles, and the entire situation, from myself. I don't know what was most damaging.

Although shutting down is one way to force yourself back to the issues, shutting down also squelches the mental effort needed to get at issues that cause shutdown. When you are shut down, you can rarely think your way out of being shut down. You can't think your way out of a paper bag. While shutting down is a strong way, it is also a harsh destructive way, and a way not guaranteed to get good results.

Only over a lot of time, with luck, and good experiences, did I sometimes find enough extra energy to chip away at the issues until the block finally broke. That is why it took so long. Only when deep problems are largely resolved anyway could I know I had been shutting down because of them. When deep problems are resolved, then the process automatically exposes itself and ends.

Even when I was not fully shut down, contradictions and anxiety forced withdrawal and led to some bad behavior too. It brought out some bad rude behavior in me. I apologize to everybody but especially to friends who endured a lot. When I stopped shutting down after about 2010, life got a lot better. I hope I was nicer to people too.

NO OVERWHELMING SENSE OF DOOM

Some people are born with an overwhelming tendency to see the world on the edge of disaster. They are skittish; "Olive Oyl" from "Popeye". Some people see an urgent need for people to band together to avert disaster. Some people use impending disaster and the call for action as a way to control other people. These days, these selfish alarmists find a secure place among Right and Left extremists.

I am not like that. I do tend toward depression, and I enjoy dark "alt" rock and roll as much as anybody. But, basically, I have a happy disposition, and don't like it when people do only as I wish. I like sunshine, cookies, and even sometimes light jazz and big bands. I was kind of a goofy child. I love nature and art. If the world were not grinding down, it would be a wonderful place. But the world is grinding down, and it is too late now to stop a lot of bad stuff from happening. This is what made me unhappy since I was a child, not because I am innately miserable and seek an excuse, unhappiness is a trendy stance among adolescents, or alarmism is a way to get what you want. I wish the world would have gone up instead of down. I would rather be happy.

FIRST SHUT DOWNS

The first time I remember having a strong long depression was fifth grade. The first time I recall shutting down over issues was as a freshman in high school. At the time, I knew that the issue was the failure of democracy, but I buried this insight. The shutdown was not normal angst by a school kid. Freshman year in high school was also the first time I tried to deal with the core problem (democracy and human

nature) indirectly through secondary problems (poverty, racism, sexism, etc.), and I realized that tactic would not work.

I can't blame my teachers for not explaining contradictions and saving me. Later, college professors could not explain, nor could ideologues, cultural gurus, movies, TV, music, pop artists, or political pundits. The situation could have been explained if people had taken seriously the failure of human nature and democracy. But nobody can take this issue seriously without being called un-American. Teachers get fired for doubting populist democracy.

My early shutdowns did not come because teachers and adults were hypocrites. Hypocrisy in academia pushed later crashes but not in my youth. The adults around me were mostly good smart sincere honest people who believed in the American ideal, recognized the faults of democracy, tried hard to make the system work, and took pains to be fair. They believed in the innate sufficient goodness of people and in democracy; and they acted on their beliefs. Although many were Republicans, still they were the kind of people on which the freedom of the 1960s and afterwards was based. Some parents of school friends were wonderful people and they still serve me as role models: Wyatt, Baxter, Anderson, Stone, Hoelzle, and Rasmussen. They were the most honest, decent, and fair people I have ever known. There was no better way to learn to be a good person than from them. Ironically, their goodness eventually made me feel worse because, when I rejected idealized democracy and human nature, I felt that I rejected the best people in my life. I felt as if I rejected their decency and so all true decency.

Nor did I shut down because my friends were stupid. Most of my friends were smart really good people who tried to help me. My high school friends, and friends I made at every school and place, were good people doing the best they could practically and morally. They helped me.

COLLEGE, VIETNAM WAR, AND THE DRAFT

After high school, I went to Pomona College near Los Angeles from 1967 to 1968. The teachers were good at Pomona, especially the philosopher Morton Beckner. Yet they used ideas that I knew did not work. I liked to hitchhike into LA. Gaining wider experience in So Cal only convinced me that particular problems such as war and racism were not solvable if we would not face deep problems. The "counter culture" flourished at Pomona then. Its solution too was wrong because it had a badly distorted idea of human nature. After a few months there, I shut down again and could not work at all.

So I decided to get a look at the world from a different perspective. I dropped out of college. I gave up a four-year full free ride. For a while, I felt less burdened and more relaxed than I had in years.

I tried to join the military, especially because the Vietnam War was on and it was my duty to help. At first, joining the military was a good idea. If it had worked, service likely would have helped me, and I might have done some good that way. During the recruiting process, recruiters gave me tests for programs. Then I caught recruiters lying to me, and I saw that the military then was another corrupt institution and so anti-democratic. This insight induced the same gut-feeling revulsion toward the draft that I had felt toward institutions while in high school and at Pomona. Democracy is sacred, so the only thing to do then was to reject the military, to become a Conscientious Objector ("CO") and do alternative service. My draft board

thought I was nuts but granted my case. I did service at Planned Parenthood in Oakland, CA around 1970 to 1971.

I did not object because I was a pacifist or I did not like policies then – although I did not like policies then. I objected because the military then was anti-democratic and so anti-sacred. Since then, the military has gotten much better. Now, with decades of experience under my belt, I am not sure how I would assess the military making mistakes while trying to carry out flawed and harmful policy. I would have to be in the situation again to know for sure.

Making an irrevocable decision, on moral grounds, with big consequences, led me to understand moral commitment and the importance of moral commitment in human life. This feeling has served me well. It was a turning point in my life. Morality matters. Simple plain decency matters.

I also have wondered if I avoided the military less for moral reasons and more from fear. The Vietnam war was real and soldiers died. Wondering about that too has helped me to be real and to grow up.

AFTER CO SERVICE, IN PORTLAND

While in Oakland, I met my first-wife-to-be, Ginnie. After my CO work was over, we moved to Portland, Oregon, and then we got married. For about a year around 1972, we worked at the University of Oregon Medical School in Portland, which was also Multnomah County Hospital. I took specimens from patients, mostly blood from outpatients, but also specimens from patients in the wards. My experience with renal patients, diabetics, children with cancer, and various outpatients affected me. Although some people are sick because our bodies go astray, most disease is caused by stress, and most stress comes from us and from society. Mostly we make our selves sick. We cannot treat symptoms alone but must treat the root causes of stress and disease, which means we have to treat social problems. I decided I could not serve by being a physician but had to seek deeper tactics.

Seeing how stress made other people sick made me see how stress made me sick too but the insight did not help right away to undo the causes of stress. Seeing a problem is not the same as solving it. That was a lesson I learned there too.

The time that I had out from school then, while still working and doing some good, made me feel much better. The memory of a situation that combines doing good with working a job stayed with me. I sought it again when I returned to the US in 2000.

I had to go back to school if I was not to die of boredom, was to make something of myself, and was to contribute something useful. I wound up back at the University of Oregon from 1973 to 1976.

ANIMAL BEHAVIOR

I loved animals and got along with them well even though I am badly allergic to most of them. They seem to like me. At the U. of Oregon in 1973, I took John Fentress' animal behavior course, and a light popped on. I saw links between animals and people. I did independent study on animal behavior at Oregon, at the station that Fentress had started there and which was run by Jenny Ryon. Jenny was a great person,

helped me a lot, and I owe her. A visiting scholar from England, Tim Roper, let me work on his studies with gerbils and other animals, and made me co-author of a paper on gerbils. Besides gerbils, I worked with raccoons, a pack of wolves, and a troop of macaque monkeys. I still love to read about animals and evolution. I saw work with non-human animals as a foundation for knowing about humans. Roper also introduced me to the fiction of Dashiell Hammett.

PART AND WHOLE

Here I interrupt gazing in the mirror to deal with some actual ideas. Hard science, such as physics, looks at the world from part to whole. A physicist can explain a TV by tracking electrons as they move through the equipment. In contrast, most social “scientists”, such as anthropologists, look at the social world in terms of the whole. Society and-or culture is the primary reality, people fit in to it, and people re-make the social whole when they act according to its rules. The French are the French, and they remake France when they act as the French. Biology has done it both ways, usually without being able to reconcile the two, but without worrying much. In contrast to other social sciences, Western economics tries to be more like physics. It explains whole economies in terms of the self-interested actions of individuals (consumers and workers) and business firms. It sees properties of economies in terms of how individuals and firms act and interact. For reasons I can’t go into, beginning in the 1920s, the part-point-of view (reductionism) and the whole-point-of-view (holism) increasingly conflicted.

When I first began anthropology at the University of Oregon, the points of view were fairly well balanced. Anthropologists knew that culture channeled some behavior. Anthropologists also knew that people were adept at interpreting their cultures to get what they wanted, and that people kept a watch on their fellows to make sure their fellows did not get away with too much. In acting for themselves along the lines of their culture, people often inadvertently recreated their culture. In acting as individuals along the lines of Oregon culture, Oregon people got what they wanted and reinvigorated Oregon culture at the same time. The school of “cultural ecology” accepted that people acted so as to do well within a particular natural context, yet they are guided by their culture, and they remake their culture when they act to do well for themselves, but they do not necessarily remake their culture exactly. This all made sense to me, and it is what I planned to pursue in anthropology. At anthropology at Oregon, I got a solid grounding in basic anthropological theory including ideas about culture, society, social organization, and ecology. I had some good teachers there. Thanks.

In the 1960s, a movement arose within biology that looked at everything consistently and rigorously from the point of view of self-interested individual animals. It can explain ALL social phenomena in terms of the actions and interactions of individual animals each trying to reproduce as best as possible. It explains the nature of particular kinds of animals (cat nature, dog, wolf, ant, etc.) in terms of how those animals evolved, and it explains social groups in terms of individual animals acting, and interacting, on the basis of their evolved nature in particular ecological settings. It provides good explanations for how morality and cooperation evolved. The successes of this way of thinking are hard to overstate. The movement is called “sociobiology”, or, now “evolutionary ecology” or “evolutionary biology”. It has become the basic starting point of biology. The movement links ideas from economics, ecology, and biology. Sociobiology has a realistic view of human nature as self-interested. It derives morality from self-interest. It suggests we can merge research on animals and people. Mainstream anthropology scorned sociobiology as a

mere ideology that reduced people to animals, ignored culture, and offered itself as a tool of rulers to rationalize oppressive capitalism.

In the 1960s, partly as a result of the Vietnamese war, two movements arose within social science that set themselves up as contrasting “enemies” but really had much in common: “rational choice” and “moral economy”. “Rational choice” explains personal action, social organization, and social change, in terms of people acting in their own interests. Peasants revolted when landlords took so much that the peasants couldn’t live; South Vietnamese peasants joined communist movements because communists kept their word and helped; peasants did not help the South Vietnamese government because it did not keep its word and did not help. “Moral economy” is holistic. It assumes people feel strong bonds based on the values of their society, such as that nobody should starve while somebody else feasts. Revolts result when one group in society violates the moral bonds. Peasants revolted when the landlords took more than the usual 50%. To me, these views do not seem diametrically opposed, and are not too hard to reconcile if we are reasonable about human nature. Anthropology rejected rational choice while it warmly embraced moral economy. Rational choice made sense to me. It went along with my Oregon culture. It went along with economics and sociobiology.

In the 1960s, cultural Marxism arose, followed by offshoots such as postmodernism, structuralism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction. The details are tedious and not useful. Cultural Marxists assert that culture dominates people, but some people within a culture, such as capitalists, can control the culture to their advantage. All people seek power yet the forms of power are defined by the economic and cultural system, and by already-powerful people within the system. People remake the economic-cultural-power system when they seek the power that is defined by it. Cultural Marxism is strong holism. As Marxism, it should pay attention to materialism, including ecology, economics, and evolution; but it replaced scientific materialism with a focus on culture and power. In seeing people in terms of power, a cultural system that defines power, and a system that remakes itself when people pursue defined power, academic cultural Marxists might have been projecting their own situation onto a world that is more complex and interesting. Anthropology embraced cultural Marxism, and rejected rivals. Cultural Marxism and moral economy were related, and got along. Cultural Marxism rejected rational choice. Cultural Marxism became a pillar for the women’s movement, gay movement, and PC. Its relation to ethnic movements is complex. Cultural Marxism offered some penetrating and useful critiques of social relations all over the world. Yet it also made mistakes. Cultural Marxists hated sociobiology. Cultural Marxists scorned sociobiologists as dupes and conspirators. They refused to consider the truth or value of the ideas.

Eventually sociobiologists came to dislike holistic anthropology and cultural Marxism in return. Relations between them were bad.

ACADEMIC ANTHROPOLOGY AS A SOLUTION AND ANOTHER PROBLEM

At Oregon, I settled on socio-cultural anthropology with an emphasis on ecology. I took a lot of physical anthropology too, including courses on primates, bones, and anatomy (with cadavers). Anthropology let me get at human nature and social problems, anthropology was interesting in itself, was close to the math and science that I liked, and promised to let me do some practical good. It was a good choice at the time.

After undergraduate study at Oregon, I got a National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship, which I took to Harvard in 1976. I wanted to study human ecology from the point of view of sociobiology, using what I could from animal studies. The best person in the world then for that was Irv Devore. Sadly, he just had a heart attack. I am biased so take what I say with a grain of salt. Most other faculty were dead set against it. What prevailed at Harvard then were overly-intellectualized theories of culture ultimately derived from clever but not very durable European philosophy of the 1900s. Harvard anthropology was the first time in my life I was treated with contempt by people who knew better, both faculty and students. As in C.S. Lewis' book "That Hideous Strength", I saw that wannabe intellectuals are susceptible to glitzy ideologies, and were willing to hurt people to find fulfillment as agents. Not only did professors disdain what I studied but they treated me like a hick who should have been sweeping the halls – "Good Will Hunting". A few students and faculty were friendly, mostly fellow sociobiologists. I left after a year.

I moved to the University of Michigan in 1977 because it was supposed to have the best human ecology program in the world. Although I took courses, mostly I studied on my own. Sadly, Michigan too had dumped real science in favor of cultural Marxism. I was the only student interested in sociobiology. No anthropology professor knew much about it, and most held it in contempt anyway. Unlike Harvard, the faculty at UM were kind, respectful, and helpful – except for one obnoxious professor who disliked me and tried to get me thrown out. They thought I was crazy to pursue sociobiology but they respected my intelligence and choices. The students were all good to me and they didn't care what I pursued. My good base at Oregon had impressed me with the need to study culture and social organization. The tendency of wannabe smart people to cultivate chic ideologies was just as strong at Michigan but it did not hurt me much there.

The only professor at UM who did sociobiology of humans then was Richard Alexander, a biologist rather than an anthropologist (Rob Burling in anthropology picked it up quickly, before it became trendy, and did good work in it.) Alexander was a pioneer and did some of the basic work in fields such as why animals live socially and how morality evolved. The anthropology faculty treated him rudely. They dismissed him or thought him dangerous. Maybe because I represented bad anthropology to him, Alexander treated me rudely and did not want much to do with me. He never believed I was a real sociobiologist.

I also studied economics, mostly on my own. I took a reading course from Dan Fusfeld in the history of economic thought that helped me greatly.

Anthropology is full of interesting puzzles and profound questions such as about how traditional fishing people don't overfish and when women have status and power. Work on these issues adds to the truth and sometimes work on these issues is useful. But puzzles and seeming depth can mislead. Apart from giving some lines to recent movies and TV shows, anthropology has not really helped life get better. A basic sense of human decency is more useful and powerful. People did not fight apartheid because of a course in college. I cannot think of many anthropology papers that have shaped legislation on working conditions or on gay rights. Working on these issues can make you feel you are deep and useful while not really being useful or profound.

I came to see that anthropology was not addressing deep problems or secondary problems, even though anthropology was adept at pseudo-profound ideologies. Even if anthropology did address some specific questions, the answers could not apply to real problems. We do not need to dissect the role of culture in

gender to see that women can be competent citizens. Sociobiology is not usually an advance. Even if we see how self-interested striving for reproduction creates patterns of kinship under particular ecological conditions, that insight does not tell us how to make democracy work. Sociobiology has a much better idea of human nature than mainstream anthropology but even its idea of human nature is not accurate enough to help with the basic question of democracy. Anthropology and sociobiology became more like diversions to me, like PC or recycling, often worthwhile but not getting ultimately to the core.

(I need to be more precise. For me, the central problem was always social organization, partly because democracy is a kind of social organization, and because problems, such as unemployment, take place within a social organization. If I could understand social organization in general, I might understand what was wrong with democracy, fix it, and fix secondary problems such as unemployment. While sociobiology studies interesting important topics, such as how old people support young people, how much a woman expects for a dowry, and how humans evolved, it has not made progress in getting at social organization. In the 1960s through 1980s, animal studies made progress in explaining the organization found in animal species. Unfortunately, those ideas could not transfer fully to human societies. Recently, animal studies seems to have dropped focus on social organization to focus on specific issues such as infanticide and intentions. I could not get sociobiologists to understand my concern with social organization in terms that made sense for people without sounding like a simplistic social anthropologist of the kind that had fought sociobiology for decades.)

My old anti-institution training kicked in. Even apart from problems with anthropology, I just did not like academia. It felt wrong. Yet I had to earn a living as an academic. I loved the puzzles, contributions to truth, and the idea of working with various peoples. I couldn't stand the arena. I thought I could handle the contradictions but I was wrong.

I was going down the wrong path. I told myself I wanted to use my work as a way to understand and help but by 1977 I knew that was not happening. I could be an academic and pretend to care while not really doing anything that mattered. I could pretend to care while really avoiding issues. Many academics take this path; the writers of the TV show "Law and Order" often poked fun at it. If my conscience had not shut me down, that would have happened.

By 1978, I felt gut-level revulsion for academia such as I had felt in high school for institutions in general and later for military recruitment. I felt anger toward academia without being able to use the anger well and without letting anger go when it did more harm than good. I shut down often. My feelings were partly a reaction based on my cultural and class background but there was enough reality behind my feelings. I avoided total shutdown by looking forward to upcoming first field work.

Ann Arbor was a great town for the progressive pop culture of the late 1970s. I loved Punk (Ramones), New Wave (Talking Heads, Blondie, Brian Eno), Power Pop (The Cars), and political music (Clash, The Specials, Reggae). I learned about jazz from the 1920s and 1930s, and still love it. The bar scene in AA was great but I couldn't afford to go much. Patti Smith and her husband Fred had their own bar in AA. They routinely brought in talent like the Violent Femmes.

I got to know some of the activists in Ann Arbor, in particular the feminists and lesbians. I learned more from them, and owe them more, than I can ever say. They are terrific. They were correct about most

social issues of their day. They tended to be radical populist democrats, so they went along with my early culture. On the whole, though, they are wrong about human nature, populist democracy, capitalism, and even about some aspects of gender. They hated sociobiology because they wrongly thought it bolsters traditional stereotypes. They overlooked deep problems in human nature and democracy, and focused on secondary problems such as sexism, so they tweaked my skittishness about using secondary issues to avoid the primary issue. Disagreeing with them felt like betraying the best people around me. Modern men and women of 2014 are on a much better track with much better balance.

I got divorced from Ginnie about 1978. She is a good person, and she did nothing wrong.

FAILED DEMOCRACY AGAIN

In the beginning of the 1970s, I still had hope for populist democracy. By the end of the 1970s, I had lost almost all hope. Jimmy Carter increased hope; the American people undermined hope. In the 1980s, I enjoyed the calm in the "culture wars" but political, economic, and cultural events convinced me that the problems were as real, and more hopeless, than ever. The 1990s showed that Americans happily persist in stupid ideologies even when reality made clear the ideologies are wrong. The 1990s confirmed that Americans are happy to indulge in treats rather than deal with reality. By the 2000s, after Asian economic problems, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, massive mismanagement of America, the return of the culture wars, the national debt, large scale greed on all sides in the real estate market, the erosion of education, and the decline of the middle class, I knew I was right. The economic collapse America after 2006 (not 2009) was more sad confirmation.

FIRST FIELD WORK

My first field work lasted from September 1980 through September 1983, three years. I spent the first four months in Bangkok learning language, culture, and society. I spent a lot of time just roving the city talking to people, going to movies, etc, much as I had done in 1967 hitchhiking into LA. I met my current wife, Nitaya. She was a teacher at a language school. We got married in October 1982. After that, for about a year, she lived in the village field work site with me.

For over two and a half years, I lived in a village of about 2000 rice farmers in Southern Thailand, located on a sandy beach. We had no electricity until about the last month of my field work, which was wonderful. If you ever live without amplified sound, ever after you will hate boom boxes, boom cars, "entertainment" systems, and loud voices. Details about life in Thailand are not important. Lessons are.

I didn't know what I was doing before I left for field work other than I was looking at how individual action led to social organization. I knew families were a good place to begin. I was lucky to find a lot of patterns and a lot of evidence. More anthropologists should go do field work when they are not sure what they are looking for. It can lead to intellectual honesty, curiosity, and deep honest empiricism. I learned to respect facts as I found them, and to rely less on theoretical preconceptions. I wished to learn about Thai culture and Buddhism also, and succeeded at that too.

Deep down, people are similar all over the world. The differences can be important though. You have to learn both. There is no way around this.

I got really sick several times and almost died at least once. That helped make life more valuable.

People will not limit their behavior, or reproduction, to preserve nature or preserve good quality social life. We have to build institutions so that people's self-interest leads them to do this. We have to pay attention to culture when we build institutions.

I had half-a-dozen good friends in the village. The man in whose house I lived was an up-and-coming local politician, had been a fishing boat captain, and knew how to kick butt, so I learned a lot about the real political world from him. I spent the first few months of fieldwork drinking whisky every morning so that I was often drunk by 10 a.m. My next door neighbor was a village headman, smart, extremely quick with his hands, but a drunk. He and I hit it off, and liked teasing each other. He used to beat his wife when he was drunk, and I had to ask him to stop. The abbot of the monastery in the village was the most revered monk in the area. He was kin to the headman, and very smart. When I finally stopped drinking every day, I started going to the monastery often and learned a lot from him and other good Buddhists. I talked to him, and I recorded all of his sermons for a year. Another man, my best friend, was about my age, had a couple of young children, and later led a local movement to sell organic food to cities; more on him below. I met a lot of good people and hard working people.

Not all of my neighbors were good. One of my next door neighbors was a pirate who had murdered and raped Vietnamese boat people. I met the most important gangster in the region, just down the road. He and eight members of his family were murdered in their house by people with automatic rifles.

I like the Thai people but, unlike other anthropologists who love "their" people, I do not love the Thai. I am happy in Thailand, could easily live there, but would be happier in parts of the American West or Midwest. The Thai have some habits I do not like. We do not have to love all non-White non-Western non-middle class non-rich people while still respecting them, liking them, and wishing them well. I think that is more important than pretended love.

The Thai desperately needed to develop economically and desperately needed jobs. They also needed to preserve their ecosystem, which was being destroyed. Their own culture is a large block to successful development and successful ecological co-existence. Culture really can work against you. There is little I could do to pay back my host people in a way that really mattered to them and would make a difference in the lives of their descendants.

I wanted to learn about Thai culture. I participated in all ceremonies and events. I became the village photographer and historian. Culture really does matter in how people act and how society is organized. Culture and self-interest both matter.

On the scale of world democracies, Thailand is clearly on the good end. Yet it is far from successful, and the majority of the Thai understand political freedom no better than the majority of Americans. Thailand is a constitutional monarchy like England. The Thai King almost killed himself trying to lead the Thai people toward democracy. He refrained from interfering in serious issues even when he clearly knew what was best, and knew that politicians would not do the best thing, because the King wanted the Thai people to

learn to do things for themselves. Sadly, they did not. If the Thai cannot succeed in democracy, then few peoples can succeed.

The Thai are wonderful in many ways. They are easier to get along with than Americans. Contrary to false stereotype, they have a strong sense of morality and decency. They are less apt to impose morality on you than Southern Americans. Still Thai character does not lead to a paradise for humans in Thailand. The notorious sex trade in Thailand is only a small part of what goes on, and it does not represent most of the Thai people, who are decent, honest, hard working, and enjoy art and religion. Yet the sex trade does show what can go wrong even among well-intended smart nice people. The Thai do not have it in their nature-culture to be adept enough for populist democracy. If they are not adept enough, and Americans are not adept enough, who is?

RELIGION AFTER FIRST FIELD WORK

I learned to love Buddhism and Taoism. I loved talking to intelligent thoughtful Buddhist monks and to good hearted Buddhist monks. Even so, I knew I was not a Buddhist or a Taoist. I still believed in God and still held Jesus' morality highest. Religions get along better when they acknowledge and accept their differences. Buddhists usually are willing to do that. I had no idea what to do about my religious outlook so I did nothing at the time. In hindsight, I can see that I needed to talk to somebody about this issue but there was nobody. That is one reason why later I wrote about religion.

BACK TO MICHIGAN

Once back in Michigan in late 1983, it took me five years to process my field work data and to write my thesis. That was a long time. I do not explain why here. Mostly masses of data with no previous work on how to analyze it. Ask me if you want to know. Eventually I got my PhD in 1989.

Due to illness, Nit and I could not have children.

I taught from January 1984 until June 1989 as a TA at Michigan, and then again for another few months in another position. Teaching was two-edged. I loved interacting with students. I hated grading. I hated the scramble of students for jobs and for slots in grad school. I hated pretending everybody was equal in ability, and everybody deserved the highest slots. I took a lot of time to prepare. I saw students too many hours during the day. I did extra things for them. I enjoyed it, but it took its toll.

I did not know whether I wanted to be mostly a generalist, SE Asia specialist, economic anthropologist, or sociobiologist. I should have been mostly a sociobiologist but did not know then. No one camp would accept me because they all saw me as in another camp. Except for a few small cases, and one episode described below, nobody was mean to me. I was used to being on margins but I was also used to being able to enter a group when I needed. Except at Harvard, people accepted me when I wanted to interact with them. This was the first time I really couldn't find a home when I needed to. Living always on the outside took its toll on both Nit and me. Some of our friends recognized the symptoms and tried hard to socialize me, such as by giving me birthday parties and taking me places. I didn't know how lucky I was. I thank them, and hope they are doing well.

While I was in Thailand, more sociobiologists had come to Michigan, they set up an institute, and they had study groups too apart from the institute. At first, back at UM, I was excited. I was also confused because I had gotten used to sociobiology being disdained and excluded. I went to a few study group meetings and went to the institute a few times.

One day, Dick Alexander took another student and me to lunch in a big restaurant – the public site for a break-up. He said we disrupted the sociobiology community, and we had to change or leave; he meant: “You are not like us, you undermine our solidarity, you can’t change for the better, we don’t like you, stop going to the institute and the study groups, and stop hanging around”. Alexander was not the sole bad guy but was primarily a vehicle for the feeling of a big strong clique within sociobiology at Michigan. My friend and I were clear about the need to consider both culture and individual action. To sociobiologists, that meant we were on the side of mysticism and cultural Marxism against scientific sociobiology. Alexander’s pronouncement likely had less to do with me in particular and more to do with antagonism between anthropologists and sociobiologists in general. Regardless, I stopped going. I didn’t have the energy to fight back. I was out. It was like Harvard but in mirror image.

To their credit, ten years later when I was in the field again and I needed to catch up by reading the latest work, I wrote to many sociobiologists and they sent me material in the field. Not only people responded who were at Michigan when I was expelled but so did people elsewhere who barely knew me or did not know me at all. Despite what happened at Michigan, I have always found sociobiologists to be kinder and more humane than academics in general.

Unfortunately, expulsion by sociobiologists did not lead anthropologists or Southeast Asian specialists to accept me. Nit and I were still out.

By the time I finished my thesis, I had re-awakened deep dislike for academia such as I had felt in the late 1970s. The sight of academics annoyed me. Even when they created knowledge, I found them deeply suspect. I was angry. I was angry without being able to use the anger or to tone it down when my anger did more harm than good. I was so angry I didn’t even know I was angry. Because I had to make a living in academia, I was hiding my own feelings from myself.

Doing field work, writing my thesis, teaching, figuring out academia, and looking at mid-level problems as they developed during the 1980s, all kept my mind off deeper problems of democracy and human nature. As I worked through all that stuff, the deeper issues made themselves felt more. A shut-down was close. I needed a vacation. Unfortunately, I did not have the finances. I had to have a job soon.

OHIO UNIVERSITY AND THE ECONOMICS BOOK

In 1990, I got a job at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. Whatever Ohio U was apart from that department, when I was there, that department was a poisonous disaster. Briefly, a civil war raged, I was caught in the middle, and chose the losing side. OU Soc-Anth had some good people and some horrible people. The end results for Nit and I was marginalization, I did not get tenure, and eventually I set off to do other things. Going to OU likely was the worst thing that ever happened to me.

Ohio U students were fairly smart kids who didn't want to fall into the huge pot of Ohio State and who couldn't get into elite schools. They came from the working class and petty professional class. Some were Appalachian, a culture similar to native Oregon culture. Ohio U is on the border of Ohio and West Virginia, in the hills. I had no trouble getting along with the kids and teaching them. They responded really well. As at Michigan, I loved interacting with students but hated the system. I did well enough so that one year I was voted best professor at OU. I miss the students.

My time at OU confirmed my assessment of academia and strengthened my bad feelings about it.

In the meantime, Reaganism, repeated economic problems, including the collapse of 1987, growth of the ideology of entitlement, and growth of the selfish brand of PC, made clear America was going the wrong way. Within a few months of moving to Ohio U, I began to write a book on economics that I hoped would help. It was intended as a clear look at economics for non-economists. My inner voice told me to write the book and quickly. Careerist anthropology could wait. Publishing articles out of my thesis could wait. Turning my thesis into a book could wait. Tenure could wait. I put other projects aside. I thought I could finish in two years at most and then get back to stuff that gets you tenure. At the end of four-plus years, I had a decent manuscript but I had no publisher and I still had work to do. I had never written a book before and was surprised at how long it took.

Nobody at Ohio U read the book. I was denied tenure. That came as a large relief. OU would have been a very bad trap. I was happy to be out of there. I hope all who stayed there did well.

At the time I began writing the book, it was not a diversion from deeper problems and it was not a way to avoid getting tenure while appearing to work for tenure. I really thought it would help.

One good did come of OU. I began to understand how anger had to be controlled. I began to see that anger was a good tool for understanding hypocrisy and keeping me away from hypocrisy but that it was dangerous too. I had to find ways to get past it.

ILLNESS

My health got worse beginning in the late 1970s. When I got my PhD in 1989, I was making it through the day but that was all. At Ohio U, everything got worse. I slept three hours a night for weeks at a time. I got a urinary tract infection that put me in the hospital for a week. I pulled a muscle in my butt so I almost could not walk for a week. Both illnesses were stress related. Physical problems could not be treated until I came to grips with deep spiritual problems. I was shutting down intellectually and physically. That was dangerous.

FULBRIGHT IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

As I was leaving Ohio U, I got a Fulbright in 1995 to go study shrimp farming in Southern Thailand for a year. That should have been a good experience and a good preparation for another job but it didn't turn out that way. I was assigned to the Coastal Resources Institute (CORIN) of Prince of Songkhla University (PSU) in Haat Yai City in Songkhla Province (Jangwat), Thailand. The head of CORIN was a horrible bad

man, with a dangerous mental condition, and he blocked my research so as to force me to serve him. He failed. He threatened Nit and I with physical violence by his family.

Luckily, Nit and I met interesting worthwhile people outside CORIN, especially people who were working on ecology, economics, society, and gender. They were PSU faculty, members of local NGOs, the press, anthropologists, and just folks. I wish I could go into who they were and how they helped. I wish I could thank Nithi, Toom, all the Thai NGO people, Richard, and Tyra enough.

CORIN had a project at a nearby Muslim fishing village, located on a large bay. Nobody at CORIN would work at that village, so they let me alone when Nit and I went there. That was a blessing in disguise. The villagers fished using an unusual technique of nets on poles. The technique requires family territories, and so families owned “pieces” of water surface. That led to conflict between families, stratification, ways to resolve conflict, and ways to seek coordination. The situation there was an almost-classic version of an old well-known problem about common resources and collective management. Nit and I spent about nine months going to the village several times a week talking to people and learning about the history of fishing and of social life there. I learned a lot about real day-to-day Islam. That knowledge filled in gaps from my previous experience with Buddhism and Taoism. I got a lot of good out of it but it reminded me again of the deep underlying problems.

NIT SABOTAGED

When Nit and I tried to return to the US in 1996, her “green card” resident alien status had been revoked because more than a year had gone by since she was last in the US. Nobody at Fulbright or the State Department had told us of that rule in advance. We had to go completely through immigration again. This time, thanks to Newt Gingrich and the “family values” Congress, the laws were harder than in 1983. I had to go back to the US first, get and hold a job under particular conditions, wait for at least a year, and then send for Nit. Eventually we did that.

MORE AVOIDANCE, POTENTIALLY USEFUL

Rather than fight through the immigration process yet again immediately, I decided to stay in Thailand for a while to study shrimp farming and Thai culture. I did not intend to stay on until 2000 but we did. I could not face going to America, not being able to find a job, having to make a living, dealing with academia, and dealing again with issues and shutdowns. We lived on our savings. This financial arrangement was quite stressful to Nit.

SHRIMP FARMING IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

Commercial intensive shrimp farming exploded in Thailand beginning in the late 1980s, after I left from first field work. Shrimp farming is done in brine ponds. Huge tracts of land that had been used for rice farming, gardening, coconuts, and various other crops were converted to shrimp farms. Large areas of Thai wetlands were converted to bad shrimp farms. Shrimp farming totally changed the natural, social, and economic environment in Southern Thailand from what I had studied to something else. This is both good and bad.

Shrimp farming was important not just in Southern Thailand but to all Thailand because it was a source of needed cash and needed foreign exchange. It was a good potential strong positive force in development. It can be run cleanly, in cooperation with nature and society, if people are not greedy and if people follow simple guidelines. Sadly, of course, people are greedy and do not follow simple guidelines. They overdid shrimp farming and so devastated some of the local environment and society. All of this is what I went to study after 1990.

Here is a surprise, and where I got in trouble with activists and NGOs: the best shrimp farmers, the most environmentally and socially sound, were medium-large and large farmers. The worst were small local "native" ex-rice-farmers (chaw baan). It takes too long here to explain. This situation opened my eyes to what is really best for society, the economy, the environment, and people in general. It made me look hard at real business in a real world, and at real benefit in a real world. You have to be able to put aside all ideology. You cannot romanticize or demonize anybody out of hand.

After Haat Yai and CORIN, we mostly stayed in the city of Surat Thani. While in Surat, I worked mostly with the Surat Association of Prawn Farmers (Chom Rom Phuu Liang Kung Surat Thani). The "Chom Rom" ("chome rome") is an association of business men (few women) much like such associations in the United States. It is open to growers of all size holdings, and a few small farmers were in it, but in fact it was run by medium-large and large growers. It was dominated by capitalist men. According to cultural Marxism, that made it a den of demons. The shrimp farmers were not angels but they were far better than demons and better than the average person. They could see the big picture. They saw patterns and consequences. They knew they had to farm within the limits imposed by the environment or they cut their own throat. They could assess the limits imposed by nature. They could see when people would sometimes destroy nature for short term benefit and could see when people might avoid doing that. They were willing to cooperate in many ways and at various levels to make things work. They were motivated by profit and by competition among each other to see who was the smartest and most adept. But they knew all that and knew how to work with it. Under the right conditions, they could be a powerful force for the development and future of Thailand. I went to weekly meetings with them for two years, and I went to all their farms many times. I received one symbolic reward from them but I never received any money or other reward. My evaluation of them is objective. They were a good bunch. I learned very much from them. I owe them a great deal.

I also learned about a problem. The problem is not particular to the Thai because it repeated itself among catfish farmers in Alabama and it arises all over the world. It is a good lesson why we have problems with nature. To insure that producers operate well, they need a set of objective guidelines for practices. Their performance based on the guidelines needs to be verifiable by outside objective observers. The World Bank funded a project to institute guidelines for Thai shrimp farmers. Chom Rom producers already were running well within any reasonable set of guidelines and should have no trouble accepting a set. Yet the guidelines have to apply not just to the big producers (and to the most product) but to the whole industry, not just to the Chom Rom farmers but to all the small farmers too. Sadly, in no way could small farmers meet even modest guidelines unless the industry as a whole and the Thai Department of Fisheries helped them, organized them, and forced them adhere to standards. Even then, such supervision was not likely to succeed. So, if any set of guidelines was adopted, it was likely to fail, and the failure would cast a bad light not only on small farmers but on all farmers, including the responsible medium sized and large sized farmers. Besides, no farmers of any size want to be tied down by guidelines even if they already meet

the guidelines. They want their options open. They want to do what they want to do. As long as they can still sell their product, and are not threatened with boycott or embargo, they see no compelling reason to adopt guidelines, not even when to adopt guidelines would make no difference in their daily operations. So, with the collusion of the Thai Department of Fisheries, the Thai shrimp farmers have successfully delayed guidelines for over a dozen years even while appearing to work on guidelines. As far as I know, they still do not have a set of guidelines.

Now I return to my earlier point about local action usually is the best action and the state is not usually the best solution of first resort. In Thailand, it is impossible to do anything on a large scale without the state, so the Department of Fisheries has to be involved. Even so, shrimp farmers, and especially the intelligent well-organized farmers in the Chom Rom, need to take the lead and control the situation. They need to set the standards and insure performance. In Thailand, of course, the farmers have taken the lead and have set standards by avoiding standards. That is one way to assert local control but, over the long run, it probably won't hold up. Sooner or later an outside market force or outside political force will make the shrimp farmers adopt some standards, and, in that case, the state likely will take control. It is better to control the situation before that happens.

Besides working with Chom Rom shrimp farmers, Nit and I went out about every other day to the shrimp fields all over Southern Thailand to talk to farmers of all sizes and from all backgrounds, and talk to other people in the business such as feed suppliers and harvesters. We talked to at least a hundred small farmers. That activity actually took up the majority of my time in the field. We racked up thousands of kilometers on a trusty truck. I have a couple dozen small notebooks full of data.

FIVE TRAGEDIES

Sometime in the late 1980s, when I was not in the village of original fieldwork, the abbot of the Buddhist temple there died. He had been an inspiration to me, and a friend.

Sometime around 1990, when I was not in the village, one of my best friends, the village headman who lived next door, arranged the murder of another best friend, the man in whose house I had lived for two years. The details are irrelevant. Not only did this make me sad and make friendship tense with the headman, whenever I went to the village people wondered what I would do about it, and his eldest son made a point of threatening me with guns.

While I was on my Fulbright at PSU in Songkhla in Southern Thailand in 1995 to 1996, I made friends with Professor (Atjaan) Nithi ("Ni-tee"). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Nithi had pioneered a project in which people who lived in the forest managed the forest for sustained yield and reasonable productivity. This arrangement was an alternative to the massive deforestation and rapid commercial exploitation that had been going on. For this Nithi received the Magsaysay award, a very high honor, sometimes called "the Asian Nobel". Nithi became a leader of the environmental and social movement in Thailand, beyond the work he had originally done in the forest. Through Nithi and Professor Toom, Nit and I became active in the the movement, and became friends with many people in it. Around 1998, Nithi suffered a massive stroke. Nit, I, and his family attended him in the hospital. Eventually he lived, but he had no memory of me or Nit, and little memory of many aspects of his previous life. He had palsy, and was confined to his home, where his wife had to care for him.

My best friend in the village where I did first fieldwork, Nakhin, was about my age, and he had a wife and two children. He was always active, and always seeking better ways to make a living. In the early 1990s, he got into a movement to grow organic produce and to sell it through a network to urban areas. He was a pioneer in this work, and attracted attention from all over Southern Thailand, including from the people who had worked around Nithi. Nit and I were with Nakhin all the time he did this work. About 1998, when Nakhin had cleared all debt, and the future looked bright, he died in a traffic accident. As far as I could tell, the organic farming-and-selling network in the village died with him.

Through working with good NGO people, I came to know not-so-good NGO people and the weaknesses of the NGO movement. What I learned earlier about NGO involvement with forests and gardening was confirmed later with NGO involvement in shrimp farming. Some, but only a few, NGO people are in it for the money that they can cajole out of Western agencies. But the real problem with NGOs is that they are ignorant unrealistic ideologues. They spout phrases that could not have come from Thai culture but only secondhand from Westerners. Even if their ideas had come from Thai culture, they would still be wrong. Despite sometimes living with villagers, they do not know villagers, village life, or ecology. They do not understand, or refuse to accept, the need of village children for jobs in the modern world, and the need for realistic ideas of sustainable development. Their plans could not possibly work, and, if put into practice, would likely do more harm than good. They are on to something, and have amazing energy, but the end result will not be useful. Development in Thailand is doing as much harm as good, and it benefits mostly urban elites – but rural romanticism is not the way to solve problems with development. I hope this has changed. The Thai nation needs something like NGOs but it needs NGOs who are realistic.

BOOKS AND MOVIES AND WISDOM

On days when not talking to farmers, I read books, watched Thai TV, and saw Thai movies on VCR. We lived where vendors sold used books for Western tourists going to islands, which books included cheap Penguin classics. I read about 150 of them. We still have the books in boxes, turning yellow and brittle. I always liked watching Thai TV and movies. I got to know the head of the Thai movie institute in Bangkok, Mr. Dome. When I was in Bangkok, he let me watch old Thai movie classics all day. I owe him too. I learned about Thai movies, directors, and actors. I watched everything on TV but I was especially alert when a movie classic came on late at night. All that cultural study was a lot of fun.

Besides the fun, I did all the reading and watching because I knew my shrimp studies were not getting at what I really wanted to know. Suppose shrimp farmers did adopt guidelines, then what? Would that lead to sustainable development and a robust Thai democracy? Studying classic books and movies gave me insight into human nature that no academic theory or ideology had offered and that I wasn't getting even from rubbing my nose in something as gritty as shrimp farming. All this reading, and the talking to shrimp people, helped me to use both good and bad feelings well. It helped teach me not to suppress feelings like anger but to use them when appropriate and put them down when they hurt more than helped. When the money ran out, it was time to wrap it up and to go back and face the music.

GETTING TO AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Claude Boyd is a professor in the Fisheries Department of Auburn University in Alabama. Among other projects, he works on guidelines for fish growers and shrimp growers. He found out I needed to go to the US and needed a job so as to get Nit back to the US. In the US, he had Asian students who needed to visit catfish farms in West Alabama. The farmers in West Alabama are good people but they are skittish around strangers. The Asian students needed a cultural guide. He offered me a job guiding students on trips to West Alabama for at least a year. I took it.

I got to Auburn in March 2000. While I chaperoned students, I talked a lot with the catfish farmers. Likely due to my background in Oregon culture, I never had a minute of trouble. I had a lot of fun. I talked to at least 100 farmers, nearly everyone in West Alabama who raised fish. It was like Southern Thailand again but with a different aquatic species.

After about a year and a half, I completed all the State Department requirements, and Nit returned to the US. She got back on 7 September 2001. Four days later was 9/11/2001.

SHUT DOWN AGAIN

I should have published papers on shrimp farming when I returned in 2000 but did not. I shut down again instead. Shrimp farming is a contentious topic with many expert sharks swimming around it. If I had published papers on shrimp farming, I would have forever been stuck in the middle, labeled as a "shrimp guy", dealing with academics, officials, and NGOs; working in an aggravating situation; and too busy for anything else more important. My mind would have been captured. I would not have wrestled with the real problems.

In addition, one good friend had murdered another; my best friend had died in a car crash and now his family had no support; our good friend, and leader of the environmental movement in Southern Thailand, had a stroke, could not remember us, and was confined to his house; the priest I had liked so much was dead; many of the old people in Southern Thailand that I had gotten to love were dead; the whole ecology and social system was changing; shrimp farming was everywhere; the shrimp industry could not organize to set up standards; my wife was stuck away from me; I had spent five years in mini-Hell at Ohio U; I had spent a year in mini-Hell at CORIN; when I got to the US, the job at Auburn was not what I expected (see below); there was no hope of rescuing a normal career; I didn't want a normal career yet didn't know what else to do; I was fifty years old and would not be hired anyway; and I was unhappy about personal and social issues that I can't go into. So I got depressed a while.

Now it is too late to publish most of my shrimp data. The five plus years in Thailand was not a waste. I learned much that applies to the basic issue of human nature and democracy. The best I can do for the shrimp farmers now is to write essays about shrimp farming for the Internet and hope somehow that will help. If my health holds up, I want to go back someday now that I don't have deeper issues eating me and could focus on the task at hand.

JOB CHANGES

I needed to stay on a steady job for a few more years after Nit returned to make sure the Feds were out of the picture. By about 2002, besides chaperoning students, mostly I was working on Boyd's research

projects. Boyd kept coming up with projects, kept wanting me to work on them, and so I stayed until 30 September 2011. My situation of doing research for Boyd was unofficial, for which see below. I learned many skills to do the projects. Looking back, I am fairly sure I was the only person in Auburn who could have done most of those projects. For some of the projects, see the papers on my website.

MY CURIOSITY BEGINS AGAIN

In 2001, I found myself much as I when dropped out of Pomona College in 1968. I was on the sidelines but active. I read voraciously, at first poetry, other literature, and on all kinds of religion. I re-read religion that I had read in my youth and a lot more religion too. I read pop work on Jesus and I read the original scholarly work on which the pop work rested. When poetry and religion was mostly done, I returned to economics. Later I returned to physics and math. From 1990 through 2000, I had been out of touch with American culture. Over a few years, I saw hundreds of movies. I bought hundreds of compact discs of music of all kinds. I spent too many hours watching TV. Eventually I felt caught up with American culture. It was a lot of fun.

ONE BIG SHIFT AMONG SEVERAL SHIFTS

By 2004, I was ready to quit my job with Boyd but then came a project that affected me. Boyd got a contract with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to get data on catfish farming in West Alabama with the aim of helping catfish farmers in West Alabama set up guidelines, much as with shrimp farmers in Thailand. I did the field work and wrote the report. Some background is needed.

Amazingly, like many shrimp farmers in Southern Thailand, nearly all catfish farmers in West Alabama carry out the industry in cooperation with local nature. The catfish farmers in Alabama usually do not hurt nature or society, and, in many ways, help both. It would be easy to set up guidelines and to carry on fish farming within guidelines. In fact, the catfish farmers had already done the job under the authority of the State of Alabama, and the catfish farmers only had to get a bit more rigorous so as to present guidelines on an international stage. They could set an example for the US and the world. WWF is a good NGO. It aggressively pursues projects that change things. It correctly sees that nature cannot be tended unless we find ways for people to make a living within nature and to steward nature themselves as they do so. WWF sees that industries in the future must use guidelines and it wants to be the key agency in leading responsible industries into developing guidelines. At the same time, it cannot endorse any industries. WWF wanted to use catfish farming in Alabama as a spearhead industry. The situation here was almost ideal for all parties.

Except that the catfish farmers eventually did not go along with WWF. The catfish farmers here acted like the shrimp farmers in Southern Thailand. The details are complicated but the end result was the same: no guidelines and no industry to serve as an example. Catfish farmers knew the importance of guidelines but wanted to control the process by using an outside inspecting agency that was sympathetic to industry. Even so, something might have been arranged but then Vietnam and China aggressively entered the American markets, fish prices collapsed, a lot of American fish farmers went bust, and guidelines for getting along with nature and society were forgotten. This situation drove me nearly crazy because of the lost potential for the catfish farmers and for nature all over the world.

The field work for the report took at least six months. I was proud of my report and the role it played in setting up the process. It never got published because WWF considers it an internal document. They would not let me distribute it to other NGOs. The catfish farmers wanted me to serve as liaison between them and WWF but that never happened.

I really like the catfish farmers in Alabama. They remind me of Oregonians. They are good people. They value freedom. But they do not understand the need for institutions, and do not understand the realities of capitalism. They do not understand cooperation between farmers and NGOs. They cannot organize to get big things done. If these good American business people can't do what needs to be done, then who can? Giving up on them helped me to see the importance of the deep two problems and the secondary nature of the other problems. Giving up on them helped me put all the problems in the right framework.

Now I return again to my early point about local action is better than state action. Apparently the most recent "Farm Bill" contains a provision for the federal government to inspect catfish farms. I am not yet sure of details, reasons, and the real impacts the provision might have. My first take is "I told you so". In talking to the catfish farmers from 2000 to 2006, I tried to impress on them the power of consumers in food markets, the fears of consumers over food health, consumer fears would increase with more imports from places such as China, and that some standards eventually have to be set up by somebody. If the catfish farmers in Alabama took the early lead, they could control the situation at the local level to the mutual benefit of everybody, and thereby avoid oversight by federal bureaucrats. Otherwise, the "feds" will do it for them. Now it seems too late. Even if the main reason for the provision is to make sure that imports meet the same standards as domestic catfish, the local farmers have given up control to the state far away, and this will come back to haunt them eventually. This outcome is an example of why I am so skeptical about making democracy work.

BACK TO HEALTH

By 2004, my health was so bad I had to do something definitive. I went to a sleep neurologist. He got me off all meds and on a rigorous sleep schedule. I began to sleep through the whole night sometimes. As my sleep got better, other aspects of my health got better too. I got back to martial arts. My improved health went along with improved understanding of issues and with increased success in projects. I began to see what really bothered me, to see deep issues, and see what were secondary issues. I decided to take a stand and to finish the projects that I should have finished a long time ago. By 2007, I finished the economics book. By 2008, I often slept through the night, other symptoms were reduced, I was healthier than since I was 25 years old, and I was getting a lot done. As I finished one project, I picked up another, and kept at the process.

LESSONS OF MY JOB WITH BOYD AND AU

Professors and administrators at Auburn University are not much worse or much better than elsewhere. People in NGOs, private agencies, and government agencies are like academics. Seeing the same thing in several arenas helped to put it all in perspective. I have a better idea what people, and institutions, are good for when. I can see them as people working out of their situations.

My job with Boyd and AU Fisheries went from March 2000 to 30 September 2011. When Boyd offered me the job in Thailand, it was for at least \$20 an hour, full time, permanent, with benefits. When I got to Auburn, the job was \$15 an hour, part time, impermanent, no benefits, no sick leave, and no job security. I had to take a month off every year to maintain the fiction of being a temporary worker. Boyd said the department forced that change on him while he was away. I had to take the job anyway to get Nit back. When the job ended, I had not had a raise in eleven years. AU is not alone in treating employees this way. All over America, business firms and schools do it. This is a situation that we could change for the better if we would accept it is real, take advice from economists, and do what we need to do. We won't do that. (The solution is not to force firms to treat all employees as full-time permanent employees with full benefits, as "Obamacare" does with health benefits, but instead to treat all employees as part-time impermanent employees with no benefits directly through the employer, and for all employees to get all basic retirement and health benefits through federal programs.)

Doing this job at Auburn for so long under those conditions taught me about how most Americans live, what they wish for, and what they fear. I am like everybody else. I have not been part of the privileged upper middle class. I have paid my dues. If ever I owed anything to academia, this job took care of that debt. Even so, this job did not make me a populist. I did not forget prior lessons while I was learning this one. I will not romanticize or demonize. The working class is not made up of heroes with sure-fire insight into the truth any more than the owning class is. Sometimes "working stiffs" are right while sometimes "capitalist fat cats" are right. Now I can see clearly who is right when and why. Now I can say what is wrong or right with confidence and without fear of bias because I speak from direct experience as well as from long study.

TURNING, BUILDING, FINISHING

In 2007, I finished the economics book I had started in 1990. In 2011, I finished a popular book on Jesus. In 2015, I finished a book on religious stances, including major religions. By the end of the economics book, I had rounded a big corner. By the end of the Jesus book, I could see a long way down the new street. By the end of the stances book, I was well down the street, and ready for new streets. There never was a sharp corner. Time, reading, writing, experiences, and projects, all together did the trick. I knew I had faced the deep issues, knew what they were, had made progress toward resolving them, and would never go too far astray again. I knew I could use anger to get at people's bad behavior but that I could put it down again when that was best. I got a lot less angry.

I could work on projects, and finish projects, without fearing that I was running away from something deeper. The three books were a definitive way of telling myself that I had come to grips with the main issues and that I could not finish any project I wished. Nothing helps build a firm base for inner work like settling issues of religion. I saw that my childhood skepticism about human nature and democracy had been right and the culture of romanticized populist democracy was wrong. In accepting this, I did not feel I betrayed the people who taught me. I can criticize without feeling unpatriotic or indecent. As a skeptic about populist democracy, I have not become a fascist, Reagan Republican, or PC hack. Believing in God and respecting Jesus does not make me a tool of Religious Right Republicans or of the bleeding heart churchy Left.

After 2006, I was able to take up any topic from the past and follow it as much as I wished without fear of avoiding deep issues and therefore of shutting down. I cleaned out my catalog of unfinished studying. I began doing karate and Tai Chi again daily. I firmed up my knowledge of relativity, quantum mechanics, physics, and cosmology, using some excellent current pop science books and simple texts (the level of non-technical science writing and of textbook writing is now amazingly high). I rounded out my math skills including topics such as topology, chaos, fractals, graphs, and knots. I caught up on sociobiology and animal behavior. I learned about various kinds of music. When I pick up a project now, I see it through to where I will not have to pick it up again later unless I want to pick it up later for a purpose. Academia is no threat now, and can be an opportunity.

One index of how well I feel is how many ideas I get per day and how many of them are actually good ideas. When I was young, I used to get a couple dozen ideas a day. When I was depressed it was all blackness, and a new idea was only a deeper blackness. Now my imagination works again. I get two dozen ideas a day, and at least one or two of them are actually good.

MY OWN PROJECTS AGAIN

After 2006 and the WWF project ended, I continued the job with Boyd but that work became secondary. My own work became primary.

I self-published a cut-down version of the economics book, called "First Book in Economics". It is a "pop" non-technical book for people who fear formulas, graphs, tables, or statistics. It is mostly optimistic about capitalism but it is realistic about the flaws, such as unemployment, and problems caused by the flaws, such as racism and damage to nature. Self-publishing turned out to be a mistake for reasons that I don't go into here. Everything I said in the book is still relevant to the current economic situation but nobody bought my book and nobody knows.

The Jesus book of 2011 is called "Jesus for Most People". Just to be sure, I tried self-publishing again, but it still didn't work out. The self-published version is marred by typos. Still, I like it. It also is for a non-technical audience who want to know the likely facts about Jesus from someone who respects Jesus and who is not guided by any dogma. A corrected version is on my website.

Working on the economics book and Jesus book kept me at my job with Boyd because I needed some steady income, and did not need the distraction of looking for another job or the anxiety of finding no job. Now that I have finished them and some other research, and feel better, I can face distractions, and can use the time to finish projects. So, when Boyd ran out of money in 2011, the timing was right. With my head clear, I can work on my projects.

My third book is "Religious Stances". It is for modern people who want to be spiritual but worry about the established religions. It compares religious attitudes and assesses major religions. It is posted for free on my website. It will not be self-published. I had a lot of fun writing the book but, but, now that it is done, I can feel that I have settled some issues that I don't need to revisit. I am done with writing about religion except as an anthropologist. With this book, my religious issues are as settled as I need them to be. My sense of religious wonder will go on but I don't feel the need to sort it out anymore.

As the Obama Presidency has gone along, the American economy has not returned to levels of general affluence that people mistakenly expect, and as the Tea Party rose (and hopefully fell), it became clear that people are still ignorant about world economics and that the ignorance causes damage. Now that I am done with religion and I am clear about the deep issues, I want to return to economics until I am done with that too. I want go back to topics such as wealth distribution, sustainable development, perfect and imperfect markets, employment, finance, and the environment. Ordinary people who are not professional economists need to understand something about these topics if we to stop endlessly repeating stupid damaging mistakes.

For other projects, see notes on my website.