The Human Mind: A Modern View of Creation
The Human Mind

Loyd L. Fueston, Jr.

Published by Loyd L. Fueston, Jr.
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>i</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samplers of Writings</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 The Imagination</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 A Proper Sort of Reductionism</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Adaptive Thinking, Part I</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Adaptive Thinking, Part II</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Christian Morality</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Mind: Use It or Lose It</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Madness and Modernism</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 New Forms of Human Mind</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 The Disembodiment of Knowledge</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 The Shaping of the Human Mind</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Understanding Mental and Emotional Illnesses</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1 I'm washing my hands</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.2 My tummy bothers me</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface to Series of Sampler Collections: Why Do I Continue Recycling Essays?


I thought to make it easier for others to dig into my writings by making them available in smaller groups, with themes which will sometimes correspond to the seven parts in Acts of Being:

1. Making Peace With Empirical Reality
2. The Human Mind as a Re-creation of God’s Creation
3. Love and Stuff
4. What is a Universe?
5. Freedom and Structure in Human Life
6. The Narrative We Know as a World
7. What Means It All?
Those parts seem to have separated my writings into somewhat manageable sets but those remain large. I also plead guilty to being digressive within individual essays and across those parts, call them categories if you wish. It’s likely that most of the smaller collections of essays I hope to release will have more specialized subcategories, maybe even different from those I’ve used to know.

There is the additional problem that, having laid something of a foundation for a way of understanding Creation, I’ve moved on to building upon that still incomplete foundation. This is a necessary step. The foundation can’t ever be completed, in the way that the human mind in Thomistic thought is the sort of entity which can in principle encapsulate the world but no actual, individual human mind is capable of such. There is a more complex statement I’d now make because of my newly gained appreciation for the communal mind. As the historian Carroll Quigley told us in *The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis*:

The truth unfolds in time through a communal process.

In *The House of Intellect*, Jacques Barzun speaks of the intellect as:

Intellect is the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence; it is intelligence stored up and made into habits of discipline, signs and symbols of meaning, chains of reasoning and spurs to emotion—a shorthand and a wireless by which the mind can skip connectives, recognize ability, and communicate truth. Intellect is at once a body of common knowledge and the channels through which the right particle of it can be brought to bear quickly, without the effort of redemonstration, on the matter in hand.

The creation and maintenance of a “capitalized and communal form of live intelligence” is clearly an ongoing process, or at least an ongoing movement up or down. That process of building and maintaining a civilization, or at least pieces of one, will be relatively successful at some times and a disaster at other times. The 20th century, from that effort at civilizational suicide we know as World War I, has been a period of decay dominated by weak leaders such as the recent American presidents or strong leaders such as Churchill and de Gaulle but mostly even the best of those leaders
have been clueless about the dangers faced by the West. Even so well-read, well-traveled, and highly-experienced a man as Churchill was worried about German land-power threatening the British Empire and never seemed to realize that the tightly related baptism and civilization of the Germanic and Celtic masses of Europe were being shed. They hadn’t taken so well as popes and kings and poets might have thought.

Back to naked earth to start work on new foundations, though it would be nice to save and build into some of the old foundations.

We need a fresh understanding of God’s Creation. It’s a bit surprising, though noted decades ago, that while moral and social structures have been decaying and art and literature have been a bit troubled, science and some of the scholarly fields in the humanities have been advancing rapidly.

We don’t know how to protect our families or how to raise our young. We don’t know how to order our economies or our political communities. We Christians seem a bit incompetent at evangelizing or even at passing on our faith to the youth in our own families.

Yet, we’ve explored time and space to find they are best described as a single structure of spacetime. We’ve explored matter to find that it is strange stuff and if it weren’t it wouldn’t have stable existence. We know more about ancient Greece than Plato and Aristotle did. We know more about the Bible than the ancient rabbis or St. Jerome did. It would seem to me that modern Jewish and Christian scholars know more about the Hebrew of Isaiah than did the Medieval sage Moses Maimonides and perhaps more than did the great rabbi and scholar Gamaliel, teacher of Saul who became St. Paul.

Oddly enough, I, along with many others, have the sense that all of these great accomplishments have truly been carried out in that decaying house we know as Western Civilization.

What’s to be done?

I do what I can do. First, I’ve made peace with God by taking up with a stronger faith than I was raised in, first a strong form of Protestantism and then Catholicism. Second, I’ve made peace with empirical reality, those parts of God’s Creation we can directly perceive and explore with our minds, far greater realms than even the greatest of modern scientists and poets and metaphysicians seem to realize.
Samplers of Loyd Fueston’s Weblog Writings

As of 2012/06/21, I’ve published two samplers, including this one:


Introduction to: The Human Mind

As a man of the 21st century, I desire to have an endless stream of sequels, despite the fact I don’t actually make any money from any of these books. Still... We must plow forward when work needs the doing in God’s Creation as Isaiah and Jeremiah taught us. I haven’t seen a lot of evidence that God is impressed with the gospels of success. Be that as it may, I’ve started work on this series I’ve titled A Modern View of Creation and I present this book with the subtitle of The Human Mind.

From the next paragraph on, I steal the introduction from Part II, The Human Mind as a Re-creation of God’s Creation of that larger collection: Acts of Being: Selected Weblog Writings From 2006 to 2011, downloadable at http://loydfueston.com/downloads/acts.pdf I do make a few editorial changes to suit the new context. I have also included in an appendix a chapter about my writings from that book.

In this part, I’ve collected essays or articles from my weblogs, Acts of Being at http://loydfueston.com/ and To See a World in a Grain of Sand at http://loydf.wordpress.com/, in which I speak about the nature of the human mind, proposing it to be an entity which is shaped in response to our environments, to the world at a higher level, or even to Creation as a whole. In this way of thought, a human mind is an encapsulation of reality so far as we actively perceive it and actively respond to it. When we realize this is the nature of our minds, we can better develop them and we can begin to see that relationships, such as those which largely make up our minds, is primary over stuff. Relationships make stuff and shape stuff. God’s love creates contingent being and His love continues to shape being right to the concrete realm of things. We can play our role in shaping that concrete realm of things with our active love.
I have included Chapter 3, *A Review of Adaptive Thinking, Part I*, and Chapter 4, *A Review of Adaptive Thinking, Part II*, which are the first two parts of a five-part response to *Adaptive Thinking: Rationality in the Real World* [4] by Gerd Gigerenzer. In a similar way, I included Chapter 5, *Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality?*, which is the first part of a four-part response to *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [2] by Walter J. Freeman. There is also Chapter 6, *Mind: Use It or Lose It*, which is little more than a quote from Freeman’s book.

Though the title claims these chapters to be reviews, I don’t really have the expertise to review works in evolutionary psychology and neuroscience. I responded to them, taking what these authors claimed to be truly or likely true or speculatively plausible within their domains of expertise. In my responses, I was mostly trying to make greater sense of the human mind within the greater context of Creation as viewed by a Christian trying to be openminded and responsive to what God has made.

One last note: because this is a sampler, some of the essays referenced couldn’t be included. I changed the references to any such missing chapters so that you have a link to the original essay on the weblog. Alternatively, you could download the entire collection of weblog essays: *Acts of Being: Selected Weblog Writings From 2006 to 2011* at [http://loydfueston.com/downloads/acts.pdf](http://loydfueston.com/downloads/acts.pdf).
1 The Imagination that Can Be All Creatures

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, Acts of Being, found at http://loydfueston.com/?p=91. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/05/09.]

What’s it like to be a bat? That question was a matter of debate in certain philosophical circles a decade or two ago. I read some contributions to that debate and remember at first feeling sympathy for the arguments of those who were considered champions of the mind as something that is independent of the flesh-and-blood body in such a way as to imply mind has a separate substance – mind-stuff’. A surprising number of Christians feel this way, feel that we have minds made of some mysterious ‘mind-stuff’. Supporters of that viewpoint – Christian or otherwise, as I recall, tended to believe a human being couldn’t truly know what it’s like to be a bat because of the belief that there is something qualitatively unique which could be labeled the ‘human mind’.

I’m opposed to any absolute dualism but that of Creator/creature or necessary/contingent being – all created being is shaped from the Primordial Universe in my way of thought. As a consequence, I’m willing to see unity in Creation and to see man as truly belonging – for now – to this universe which is his birthplace and his place of formation. I’m also opposed to philosophies which are typically labeled as ‘monist’ largely because they don’t allow God to act freely, binding Him by chains of necessity to this universe which is ultimately a confusion of God and this universe.

As a Christian, I should add that the true ‘dualism’ comes down to a difference between God in His own necessary Being and God as a Creator who chose freely to create from nothing and then to shape this world from the truths He had manifested in His primary act of Creation – I call that
primary manifestation the Primordial Universe. Thus, even the dualism between Creator and creature is really a dualism between (God as necessary Being) and (God as Creator acting freely).

And, yet, there is that weaker dualistic relationship between Creator and creature. This relationship is weaker in that it’s hard to understand how we can be, in any sense, independent of our all-powerful Creator. Yet, He has told us we have some sort of freedom and that implies we can move on our own. We’re not just puppets and our wills, while far from truly ‘free’, are not bound in the way or to the extent that some, such as Martin Luther, have thought. What sense can we make of this? To make sense of this is – from our creaturely viewpoint – to understand sense and to understand mind.

By looking at so-called ‘radical’ interpretations of quantum mechanics (such as that of Niels Bohr) through the lenses of an updated Thomistic existentialism, I’ve settled in upon what might be called an existentialism as well as a relationalism – to coin an ugly philosophical term. I plan to explore what was said of relations by Leibniz, Bradley, and others, but I don’t expect to find much of use in their writings if – as I suspect – they thought like Einstein in his debate with Bohr: relations occur between substances which pre-exist those relationships and also remain unchanged by those relationships. It’s not relations as accidents of substances that concerns me but rather relationships as God’s acts of creation and shaping which concern me, and also secondary relationships as creaturely acts of shaping.

A mind shaped to understand substances is a mind shaped to understand matters of secondary importance. I don’t make that as a disparaging comment. We all have to deal with substance, including that which is our own selves. To deal well with substance is itself noble. In doing this, we reach for some sort of creaturely perfection, and, yet, we imitate God most fully by passing beyond substance, penetrating to the relationships which bring substance into being and other relationships which shape that substance into particular beings. The human mind reaches its peak when it most fully imitates God as Creator and Shaper. This is analogical to another distinction we might make between:

1. those who know well the laws God has given us by revelation and in the nature of this universe; and
2. those who understand love, the primary relationship.

A well-formed mind sees the relationships which underly reality, shaping what God has created. If that mind also has faith, it may even see the relationship of love by which God created from nothing.

Perhaps I could say the mind is the relational aspects of the human being. As such, it’s tied very strongly to the human body and its various external relationships.

I’m once again floundering a little because I’m trying to form thoughts for which I have only vague concepts. I’m not confident yet where I’m heading and, thus, more than a bit reluctant to re-define words or coin new words. I may find some help in various books that discuss quantum mechanics but probably will find no help at all in the more traditional literature of philosophy. It’s not that scientists are more clearheaded thinkers than philosophers, not by a long shot – some of each are geniuses at philosophical modes of thought and some of each are not. It is the case that the weird facts of quantum mechanics have forced honest thinkers to realize that the world isn’t always so impressed with traditional metaphysical thought. Some of the best thinkers in the field of quantum mechanics are the philosophers who’ve come in to see what they could make of the evidence, including Kurt Hubner, whose *Critique of Scientific Reason* \[5\] played a major role in helping me to understand the debate between Einstein and Bohr. See *A Christian view of Einstein’s and Bohr’s debate on the meaning of reality* at \[http://loydfueston.com/?p=10\] for a short discussion.

God’s ways are not our ways and it seems that the truths He manifested in this universe are greater than those which the traditions of metaphysics would have us believe. I’ve spoken of this in various postings (such as *Hellenistic Metaphysics is Too Small* at \[http://loydfueston.com/?p=45\]) and also in my first published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* \[3\], I’ve never said that Hellenistic metaphysics is wrong just as I would never say that Hellenistic mathematics is wrong. Heraclitus and Plato and Aristotle laid down foundational thought in metaphysics just as Pythagoras and Euclid and Archimedes did in mathematics. God’s creation has forced us to expand greatly upon those foundations. I think that a reincarnated Plato would agree with this if he were to survey modern physics and mathematics. Aquinas did agree with this, at least in principle, by noting an implication of the development of philosophical thought in its early centuries – metaphysics uses the specific sciences.
A greatly expanded understanding of the possibilities of physics and mathematics would lead to a greatly expanded understanding of the possibilities of metaphysics. At least, it should. In general, it hasn’t done so. Our age might provide interesting materials for the study of future historians of human thought. With that burst of creativity in mathematics and physics during the 19th century and the early 20th century, why have we not seen a burst of creativity in metaphysics and theology? Has something happened to stunt our imaginations? Why else have our minds not expanded into the greater regions of Creation which we have perceived very faintly?

Forgive me if I repeat myself repeatedly while I play around with ways to formulate ideas which are still too faint.

As I interpret matters, modern science is best explained by an existent- tialist philosophy emphasizing relationships rather than substance. It’s far from coincidence that a philosophy that explains the universe also is consistent with the revelations of the Creator about His purposes in creating and also His revelations about His own transcendent Act-of-being. Without getting into the details, or even knowing many of them, I can say that Niels Bohr’s ‘radical’ way of understanding physical reality is quite consistent with that greatest of all theological poems: John 1:1–18.

It’s hardly surprising that it’s taken so many centuries to understand the revelations in the Bible. St. Thomas Aquinas saw much but lived in the very early decades of the expansion of modern empirical knowledge. Rather than being a creature whose imagination can outrun the possibilities of our world, man is a creature who needs to shape his imagination and mind by learning of the wonders of our world. Moreover, the world is such that understanding it seems to let us see, however tentatively, before and beneath the world. We can penetrate to the manifested truths from which our world is shaped. And, to give credit where credit is due, it is the mathematicians and physicists, historians and poets, of the modern world who have given us the materials and the attitudes to let us shape our minds to be entities wondrous beyond even infinities greater than infinity, beyond black-holes, beyond the evidence that we live in a dynamic and developmental world, beyond the words and images which point beyond this world to the Creation of which it is part.

We can know what it’s like to be a bat or a black-hole, just because we can have some understanding of the relationships which shape the stuff of the Primordial Universe into this world and then shape particular chunks
of this world into bats or black-holes.

We have to reason to the importance of relationships, by various routes, because we can’t see relationships while we can see substance including the response of substantial beings to relationships. We think of that substance, physical matter as being primary, but science hints otherwise. I’ll not speak of primary creation, that is God’s act-of-being by which He created from nothing. When we consider secondary creation – what I call shaping, we enter the strange logical mazes of quantum mechanics where the state of a photon in one part of the lab is provably dependent upon what happens to a corresponding photon in another part of the lab and dependent in such a way as to imply instantaneous communication, faster than the speed of light.

There are two tentative conclusions to be drawn from the sorts of experiments which have given evidence of ‘spook’ or ‘at-a-distance’ forces:

1. Substantial being in this universe is linked, at the quantum level, in ways that don’t usually seem to affect the behavior of macroscopic things. The quantum level is measured by energy – it’s not necessarily small in size but rather small in energy changes. I’m not attempting to downgrade the importance of this insight by qualifying it. Those links even imply an entanglement of all parts of the universe – your body is part of systems that include stars which are billions of light-years away. Moreover, it’s quite possible that a delicately balanced macroscopic system could be sent into a different state by a quantum change, a change of energy corresponding to the transition of a single electron to a different orbit.

2. Collapse of a vaguely defined particle to one state of being occurs by some interaction. Many scientists and writers of popular science refer to this interaction as observation, often entangling this issue with that of consciousness. It seems to me to be more true to describe this interaction as the formation of a relationship and it matters not if a conscious being is involved.

This supports my general claim in my first book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* [3], that God manifested the truths which underly Creation as some sort of homogeneous being, the Primordial Universe, which is perfectly bound together in a perfectly homogeneous state of factuality or
chaos. At least, this would seem to be true from a creaturely viewpoint. We ourselves have thing-like being and can perceive thing-like being though we can work imaginatively to at least explore the properties of highly abstract forms of being. We can think about that Primordial Universe, but likely couldn’t ever see it. In fact, it’s not palpable being and God Himself thinks about it rather than touching it in the way He can touch a human being.

When God began to shape this universe, He shattered that Primordial Universe, or a part of it, making a number of particles which formed, if you will, a clay-like raw substance. This raw substance of our universe is what physicists are researching in accelerators and in astrophysical work that starts from observations of the universe in its very early stages. And it is those physicists who have also found hints of the unity which still exists to some extent.

God began shaping this clay to tell a story, a story which can be fully and truly seen only by Him.

Mind is a more direct access to the relationships which underly our world, which are the bridge from the Primordial Universe and this universe of particular, thing-like being. In this way of speaking, mind will remain the bridge between the Primordial Universe and the incorruptible world of the resurrected.

As I see matters, to think metaphysically is to penetrate to the relationships which form and shape the things and events of our universe, even to penetrate so deep as to be able to speak of the Primordial Universe or of the world of the resurrected. Being manifested truths, the Primordial Universe is somewhat a world of pure relationships. To an extent that might surprise many, including some great metaphysicians, thinking is a matter of exploratory narratives. To think narratively is to think not only in terms of purposes but also in terms of relationships, not just among the living characters but also relationships with the particular environments of those characters.

I’ve already claimed that the human mind, founded upon the human brain, is the only known entity in this world which is capable of encapsulating the world, the physical universe seen as morally ordered to God’s

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1 By this, I mean that we could not distinguish anything in this sea of chaos, assuming we could even perceive that something is there. In fact, if this way of looking at Creation is valid, this Primordial Universe is here and everywhere else, that is, it’s present wherever God has shaped it into any form of more particular being.
purposes. This possibility of encapsulating the world is very much a matter of principle and not of fact because of our ‘smallness’ and our various frailties.

Yet, this power of encapsulating God’s world in our minds gives us a way of sharing in God’s acts-of-being. As God creates from nothing and as He shapes what He has created into particular worlds, we can imitate Him in the way of a child imitating his father at work with his saws and chisels. We pick up a stick and pretend to saw another stick.

In principle, we can know what it’s like to be a bat, or even a star collapsing into a black-hole. Our powers of abstraction and of generalization, both mathematical and literary, allow us to build bridges into other forms of being, at least other forms of being shaped in this universe, shaped to God’s purposes to be the story which is this world, a morally ordered narrative.

We can think of our powers of knowing what it’s like to be a bat or a collapsing star in terms of my chronology of God’s work of creating and shaping. By our powers of abstraction and generalization, we move back in time, or down into the depths of our own physical stuff, to that strange stuff of the Primordial Universe. In these terms, the process of imagining what it’s like to be something non-human in our universe is much like that of creatively thinking about abstract mathematics except the journey to abstract mathematics may be only in that downward direction. When abstract mathematics is used directly to understand some aspect of the physical world, a return-journey occurs. When we do this, when we try to understand the world and not just to imagine being something – the efforts may be intertwined, we’re imagining what it’s like to participate with God in some of His work of shaping what He has created from nothing.
2 A Proper Sort of Reductionism

Reductionism is often seen as explaining something away and, unfortunately, that’s often the goal of those doing the reducing. This isn’t a new development in modern thought. When St. Augustine explained the mind in terms of three components – intellect, memory, and will – he was reducing a complex entity to three components he felt to be more primary or more basic in some sense. There was a reason a Trinitarian Christian theologian might try to reduce the mind to three components, though I don’t accept that sort of an analogy between the human mind and God. In any case, any sort of reduction is a reduction.

Sometimes strategies of reductionism provide substantial analytical understanding of a higher layer and sometimes they discover the aspects of an indivisible whole, allowing descriptions. In any case, the effort is necessary because we would otherwise be dealing with things and living creatures as if they were only surface phenomena. A reasonable sort of reductionism gives us ways of talking about what it’s like to be a star or to be an alligator or to be our neighbor.

St. Augustine and other great thinkers reduced as a way of developing words and concepts to understand. They never lost sight of the more complex reality they were trying to understand. Any reductionism, or any talk about a system of reductionism, which has too many words like ‘just’ or ‘only’ is immediately suspect because the thinker behind that system has reduced a whole to a pile of rubble and has disdained his responsibility to respect that whole and to show how the pieces of a system of thought allow
some understanding of actual parts or at least aspects of a complex entity or phenomena.

Let me start with an example that deals only with perception – color vision. Back in our school days, most of were taught about primary colors, red and yellow and blue, and how primary colors mixed to form other colors. In high school, we might have even seen diagrams of the eye showing receptors for the primary colors. As it turns out, that is more a fairy-tale than a scientific explanation, In fact, two great scientists of the 19th century – Helmholtz and Maxwell – gave at least one clear reason why the primary-color vision theory is wrong: if we saw colors that way, a red ball would change colors drastically when it was moved from the sun to the shade. Objects emit a very different spectrum of wavelengths under different lighting conditions, yet we see that red ball as red under a wide variety of conditions.

It’s interesting that the theory of primary colors lasted more than a half-century after respected scientists explained why it was almost certainly wrong. It’s even more interesting that it’s lasted more decades since Edwin Land, MIT scientist and founder of Polaroid, showed it to be wrong in the middle of the 20th century. Land’s experiments were rigorously conducted and definitive. What he showed, to simplify a bit, is that a colored surface with perfect smoothness and other properties that don’t allow contextual and contrasting clues will be seen as pure white by human beings. It turns out that the human brain, and the monkey brain, use ad-hoc techniques to carry out operations which are somehow equivalent to the solving of systems of partial differential equations. The interested reader can browse a copy of A Vision of the Brain [12] by Semir Zeki, one of the neurobiologists who has done pioneering work on the question of how we see colors. The primary color theory and the more recent theory of how we see color are reductionistic though that more recent theory is extremely complex and, in fact, no one yet knows what sort of basic elements will best allow analysis and discussion of the issues. We know our brains don’t literally solve huge systems of partial differential equations and yet that is the only way human scientists know of describing what our brains do in allowing us to see colors. It’s neurons that carry out these tasks by way of exchanging small electrical charges and chemicals through their various linkages.

We now know, and accept when we have to, that our control over our own bodies can be destroyed by problems with dopamine, a common brain chemical. This condition is Parkinson’s. When we or a parent are diagnosed
with Parkinson’s, we know enough not to go looking for an exorcist or for a witch to undo the evil spell which is destroying the ability to move our limbs properly. Nor do we engage in self-examination of our minds, independent of empirical knowledge. Yet, we think of such human aspects as moral will or poetic thought as if we should be understanding our moral character or our poetic skills by way of magic or by styles of philosophical thought developed in ages before the development of a proper respect for empirical reality as a concrete phase of Creation, not a world of things in some strange contact with a world of spirit or a world of truths or even a non-world of truths.

To some extent, language involving brain-cells and groupings of brain-cells will be necessary even for understanding higher-level aspects of human beings and other creatures. I do think it’s wrong to think that limited language would be sufficient for understanding our selves, as Richard Rorty speculatively suggested in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, but I agree with his criticisms of the view that such language has no important role to play in our understanding of our own natures. As created entities with thing-like characteristics, human beings can be understood only by understanding at the level of that thing-like being as well as the level of human nature.

Still, we have to be very cautious of falling into a mindless or naive reductionism, whether from laziness or ideological corruption or from culpable ignorance. That entity which is the human being does exist and mostly acts at the level of itself as an whole, yet that whole has properties, capabilities, and limitations which can be best understood by understanding first the workings of brain and brain-cells, heart and heart-cells, glands and the chemical structures of hormones. This warning applies to those who think we surely have minds or souls made of a more pure stuff than matter and also to those who think that higher-level mental or spiritual events are illusions if our stuff is ‘only’ physical matter and energy and fields.

True it is that there are immaterial aspects to our human natures, but true it is as well that those immaterial aspects are tied tightly to physical organs and physical events in our bodies. Under my worldview, these immaterial aspects come ultimately acts-of-being, existential acts, possible only to God. Secondarily, they come from lesser acts-of-being possible to God in powerful ways and to His creatures in lesser ways.

These lesser acts-of-being are different ways of speaking about the relationships including those which cause collapse of a wave-packet to an elec-
tron in a specific place with a vaguely defined momentum or an electron with a well-defined momentum and a vaguely defined location. As I said in my published book, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* without being able to elaborate: this sort of fluidity and – you might say – uncertainty in this universe at the level of creaturely perception and creaturely thought gives us some hints of the nature of the freedom which is appropriate for us, in our thoughts and in our external actions. Even our freedom is contextual and not a result of some self-contained human component called free-will. We form our minds by proper response to our environments but that formation has something of the nature of movements across a sheet of ice. We are still part of the physical universe created by God, still constrained by it, but some restrictions from our momentum have been reduced. A more fluid and graceful movement is possible – if we have taken care to obtain the proper equipment and to develop the proper skills.

There is no *a priori* reason that different sorts of stuff can’t exist, call it ‘mind-stuff’ if you will, but there’s no reason to believe this other sort of stuff does exist and some strong arguments that radically different sorts of stuff couldn’t communicate with the stuff of our bodies. If it could communicate with our bodily stuff, wouldn’t it be the same sort of stuff?

We have too much evidence of correlation between brain-events and even the most ethereal of mental events to doubt the need for any mind-stuff. For human styles of reason to be valid, any mind-stuff or soul-stuff would have to follow pretty much the same cause-and-effect relationships as the stuff of this physical universe and it would seem superfluous, no more than a shadow moving along with our bodies.

It seems certain to me that the bare language of brain-cells, brain-chemicals, and so forth needs to be supplemented by a different sort of language that allows us to speak of the events that motivated talk of immaterial minds and souls, but there’s no reason to let Christian reason, or any other sort of human reason, be corrupted by magical talk. The electromagnetic fields, and possibly quantum fields, generated by our brains might well correspond to ‘minds’ and ‘souls’. Those fields would operate in a way that would give us the impression that we have components which are immaterial. And that’s far from wrong unless taken literally. The so-called Big Bang model implies an expansion of the universe out of a state where it was an extremely compressed and homogeneous stuff. Fields seem to be the most ‘relational’ form of that stuff. In a sense, they are closer to ‘reality’, that is, to the most basic aspect of created being.
I’ve argued that relationships are primary and substantial being is created from nothing by God’s love for it – the ultimate relationship. Relationships also bring substantial being into existence in a secondary way: they shape raw stuff into things and then continue to shape those things until they become, perhaps, bacteria and then jellyfish and then slime molds and then fish and then frogs and then snakes and then rats and then monkeys and then human beings. I’ve played fast and loose with evolutionary transitions to summarize a complex history in a single sentence. The point is that evolution can be seen, from the beginning of the current expansion of the universe, as a gradual shaping of very strange stuff – almost abstract stuff – into a creature with a brain that is capable of encapsulating the universe and perhaps Creation in all its phases.

In the end, these systems of thought based on modern empirical knowledge are ways of reducing a complex entity – the human mind – to basic elements which allow us to study and analyze and maybe even understand. A system which reduces human thought to specific actions of an immaterial mind upon a physical body can be pious in respecting human nature and religious beliefs but it has to be evaluated on the basis of what is known about human beings and the physical world they bodily inhabit. A system which seeks to understand by first reducing human thought to relationships of components of the physical human body, including generated fields, is no different. Such a scheme can be used to understand though some will fear it’s being used to explain away, and there will be some who will try to do exactly that. But any scheme, including those which use mind-stuff or soul-stuff can be used to explain away. Some magical systems of thought favored by C.S. Lewis and other Christians do their best to respect human nature and its Creator by only by waving away any true understanding of the words of God as manifested in the things and relationships of this universe.

What is the test of a system of one set or another of basic elements including the allowable relationships between those elements? There is a very simply stated test which is very complex in practice: does that system allow plausible descriptions and narratives of the world which we inhabit or of specific entities in that world? The goal of any scheme in Christian thought is to understand this universe which God created and then to understand it in light of what God has told us about His purposes – and He told us that most clearly in the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, we’ve not yet come to a final or definitive
understanding of those purposes revealed in the rather unexpected narrative of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

I’ve proposed that the human brain is the sort of entity which is, in principle, capable of encapsulating God’s world, the physical universe seen in light of God’s purposes for Creation. I think it’s likely we can encapsulate a more general set of truths manifested in the Primordial Universe from which this universe was shaped. Still more importantly, as noted by various individual philosophers and perhaps some Oriental traditions, our minds are not separable from their context. Our brains are the substantial foundations of our minds, whatever they prove to be in total, and those brains are part of the physical universe and subject to the laws of that universe. Moreover, the content that ‘fills’ our minds is inseparable from the shapes of those minds falsely seen as containers.

My way of speaking about the human mind is inseparable from my way of speaking about Creation. This makes a lot of sense in the light of modern empirical knowledge and – most important of all – allows us to make creaturely sense of God’s direct revelations to us just because it makes our very minds part of the world which is a shaping of the truths God manifested in the Primordial Universe. When we reduce the human mind to basic elements provided by modern science and understood in light of modern empirical knowledge as a whole, we gain more power in understanding both our selves and our world. Ultimately, we subject our understanding of human nature to the most important knowledge we have – God’s purposes for Creation and for each of us in particular. This approach is more respectful of Creation and the Creator than are magical or supernatural ways of viewing the mind. I remain within human knowledge of the physical world, seen from my faith in God’s self-revelations, especially that He is an all-powerful Creator. In addition, I’ve been forced to realize that the sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ couldn’t be a divine response forced by creaturely errors. The crucifixion of our Lord tells us something very basic and very central to God’s purposes for Creation. It’s not given to any particular human being to understand the universe so truly as to see why the sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ moved with the grain of that universe. If any human being could achieve such an understanding, he would understand fully God’s purposes for Creation.

We reduce as part of our efforts to understand reality as a whole. Any efforts which use words like ‘just’ or ‘only’ too often are probably wrongful,
literalistic in assigning ultimate reality to our derived basic elements even at the expense of making sense of the world as a whole or even of making sense of human nature. That is how ‘reductionism’ gets a bad name. When we see the factual truth in the evolution of life, that doesn’t force us to believe life is ‘only’ a chemical process nor to believe that man is ‘just’ an ape. If anything, it forces us to give greater respect to the chemical processes of this universe and greater respect to non-human apes. It forces us to give greater respect to all the physical aspects of God’s world and to all the living creatures He has shaped within that world. It shouldn’t at all lessen the respect we feel for God or for Creation or for individual creatures, including human beings.
3 A Review of Adaptive Thinking, Part I

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, Acts of Being, found at http://loydfueston.com/?p=96. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/06/27.]

Professor Gigerenzer states in the introduction of Part I of his book [4]:

Computers and statistics have both been used to fulfill the timeless longing to replace judgment by the application of content-blind, mechanical rules. [page 1]

And he’s right about the timeless longing. Those are wrong who claim that this longing is modern. Wrongly developed, any philosophy can be turned into a mechanistic and reductionistic view of reality. This is not to deny the importance of a proper reductionism which gives us a vocabulary and concepts to discuss aspects of the whole. An egg can be reduced usefully to gain the language of “yolk and albumen and shell” but an actual egg can’t be plausibly discussed as being just yolk and albumen and shell.

Gigerenzer speaks about the hypothesis of Herbert Simon that “a physical symbol system...has the necessary and sufficient means for general intelligent actions” [page 31] and tells us that this general line of thought overthrew the efforts of some to reduce the mind to a Turing machine. For those who don’t know about this line of thought, a Turing machine is a surprisingly simple computing machine that is capable of solving a class of problems which includes, from most viewpoints, all the sorts of problems solvable by any computing machine, simple or complex. In fact, there’s a large class of mathematical problems which can’t be solved by a Turing machine though many of those problems currently being studied can be
solved, theoretically at least, by a machine based on quantum mechanical principles.

Simon and his contemporaries and successors in this line of thought had returned to some sort of dualism using different language. As someone said about the Artificial Intelligent crowd: the soul has returned and now it’s called ‘software’. It’s this sort of view that’s opposed by scientists who are, roughly speaking, non-reductionistic materialists. The brain-scientist Gerald Edelman would be a good example, since he’s written clearly and powerfully on the philosophical implications of modern neurobiological discoveries and theories. (See *A Universe of Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination* [10], co-authored by Giulio Tononi.) Edelman writes from a view which seems to be roughly that of a Jamesian pragmatism where all our higher knowledge comes from building upwards. I’ve argued against this way of thought because a world can’t simply be built from its parts though that same world wouldn’t exist without its parts, but this sort of a view is intellectually defensible and is also properly pious towards most aspects of the universe, failing to see only that it is a universe. The possibilities of a world, a universe ordered to some greater purposes, is not even intelligible in Jamesian thought.

Gigerenzer isn’t really dealing with the implications of these sorts of changes in our view of the human mind so much as he’s dealing with the root causes of the changes. When our favorite, or perhaps newest, tool is a hammer, everything begins to look like a nail until we grow bored slamming things. Gigerenzer doesn’t say this explicitly but certainly implies the truth that the brain doesn’t make a very good hammer. Nor does it make a very good computer. Nor is it an organ moved by a soul of the sort which emerged from the literalizations of of some very strange metaphors in pagan thought. Nor is it an intuitive statistician. Nor is it a battleground on which struggle either the reptilian brain against the mammalian brain or the ego against the id.

The human mind can be any of those, in some cases only by way of delusion, but it’s not any of those in a fundamental way. At the same time, our views of mind can reshape our own minds to some extent so far as I can see matters, and this as a very dangerous aspect of the flexibility of the human mind. Misunderstanding itself, the mind can misshape itself.

These very discussions are possible only because of the human brain’s capability of making a mind which – in principle – can encapsulate the universe or even the world which is, in my writings, the universe seen in light
of God’s purposes for Creation. In other words, the human mind doesn’t pre-exist as a well-formed entity, though the underlying brain has some well-formed abilities and limitations. The human mind can’t be separated from its relationships to external things, to living beings, and – most of all – to God. A truly well-formed human mind is capable of seeing a universe and then maybe a world and capable of forming a relationship with it as well as forming relationships with many things and living creatures and abstract ideas. The mind of that same human being could have been formed to mirror a computer or bureaucratic ways of thought. I’ll leave it to the reader to contemplate and fear other and still more horrible possibilities.

Nearly all scientists are well-trained to follow strictly the modern rules which separate theology and philosophy from empirical knowledge. Properly understood, this is a good rule, but it’s a methodological rule for 9-5 work-hours and, taken too literalistically, prevents any truer understanding of either the world or the human mind. Any scientists who move on to a deeper, ‘philosophical’, understanding of their field will find it very hard to escape the boundaries of a pragmatism, Jamesian or otherwise. Even the universe, let alone God’s world, will not be seen because only the bottom-up ways of thought and analysis will be seen as legitimate. In my way of thinking, the human mind can’t be fully understood without some understanding of its potential to encompass or encapsulate the world. We must have some understanding of the world, of this phase of God’s Creation, to understand ourselves.

Gigerenzer follows the rules and speaks little in a philosophical mode and not at all in a theological or atheological mode. To be sure, he’s not trying to lead us to a deeper understanding of our mind. Rather does he have that more limited goal of seeing how some particular tools have given modern thinkers ways of describing the human mind. He also seems to be telling us those thinkers were not consciously aware of what they were doing and, in my words, unconsciously literalized some useful metaphors into strict definitions of the human mind.

Gigerenzer also discusses the contradictions and misunderstandings embedded in the analytical techniques and basic assumptions of modern researchers in human thought. He shows that psychologists have been guilty of basic logical errors. For example, many researchers have assumed human beings should engage in Bayesian thinking when dealing with uncertainty and then the researchers have analyzed the results by statistical techniques inconsistent with Bayesian concepts.
Trained in statistics, some scientists saw the human mind as being some sort of statistical processing entity, confusing a potential skill of the entity for the entity itself. Others, such as Simon, were trained in operations research – generally, the use of algorithmic techniques to solve problems – and began to view the human brain as first a fancy calculator and then what we’d call a general-purpose computer.

It’s interesting in light of these academic struggles to establish an understanding of the human mind and to make one’s own definition the standard that Professor Gigerenzer speaks also of a scientist of integrity who seems to have had some good insights into the nature of the human mind and tells us of the ways in which this man and his thoughts were ignored, though he was allowed a comfortable way of living. The modern world has its own kinder and gentler ways of dealing with those who might disrupt the mainstream mindset and those sorts of rebels have to have a unique sort of moral character to stay the course during a life when they’re not even taken seriously, a sometimes more painful situation than the direct persecution that at least acknowledges the importance of the ‘heretic’.

Egon Brunswik began his professional life as a psychologist in the fertile intellectual turmoil of Vienna in the decades before WW II. In exile from Nazi-controlled Vienna, he was able to obtain and hold a respectable position at Berkeley, however he was never taken seriously for the rest of his life. Academics, including scientists, are capable of politics as bigoted as those of the average U.S. Senator. And we should remember what Polanyi once told us: Galileo’s second and more brutal inquisition was less a religious persecution and more a particularly nasty academic peer-review.\footnote{We should also remember that Stillman Drake’s reconstruction of some mysterious events during Galileo’s lifetime indicate it likely that Galileo’s first trial never took place. In that reconstruction, Galileo met with Cardinal Bellarmine who asked him not to discuss the Bible in the context of his philosophical and scientific writings. Galileo agreed and had an unsigned and non-notarized piece of paper to that effect. Drake said that paper was written in Bellarmine’s own hand. There is some evidence that Bellarmine was afraid Galileo was reading the Bible in the proper way and the Church in the wrong way and wanted time to deal with the situation. Whether or not that was a good way to handle the situation, Bellarmine died before being able to do much.} It was scientists and philosophers, Aristotelians of a certain stripe, who tried him that second time because of the danger his ideas posed to the ideas which had formed their minds and made their careers. It was an historical oddity of sorts that those particular peer-reviewers were Catholic priests – poor
men could gain higher educations only through the seminaries because only
the Catholic Church had proper resources and had also retained enough
respect for education to provide it widely.

That general situation hasn’t changed. Advanced degrees and even the
possession of an endowed professorship is no sign of an open or flexible mind.
We modern human beings aren’t really capable of distinguishing between
an educated man and a well-trained man. Thus, we rely on resumes.
4 A Review of *Adaptive Thinking*, Part II

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *Acts of Being*, found at [http://loydfueston.com/?p=97](http://loydfueston.com/?p=97). It was finished and uploaded on 2007/07/02.]

In Part II, chapters 4-6 of *Adaptive Thinking: Rationality in the Real World* [4], Professor Girgenzer provides a few arguments towards a view of what he labels ‘ecological rationality’ which he defines as follows:

Ecological rationality refers to the study of how cognitive strategies exploit the representation and structure of information in the environment to make reasonable judgments and decisions. [page 57]

While this is reasonable, it doesn’t go quite far enough. He seems to endorse a greater truth when he quotes Roger Shepard:

> We may look into that window [on the mind] as through a glass darkly, but what we are beginning to discern there looks very much like a reflection of the world. [*Mind Sights*, R.N. Shepard, Freeman, 1990]

Allowing for differences in the meaning assigned to the term ‘world’, it’s nevertheless clear that some psychologists are starting to see what St. Thomas Aquinas saw 750 years ago: the human mind is shaped in response to its environments. But this shaping process is actually two-fold. ¹ The

¹More recently, I’ve separated out the formation of a communal mind, but that wouldn’t much change this review. It’s not greatly inaccurate to think of the communal aspects of our minds to be part of what’s shaped by the responses of an individual to his immediate environment.
process of the shaping of an individual human mind to its immediate environment is possible because the human species has been shaped to specific capabilities, shaped by the responses of our ancestors to their environments and shaped to be able to respond to those sorts of environments or to environments ‘close enough’ in some sense. Professor Gigerenzer is, in a sense, trying to define what ‘close enough’ means in the specific case of analyzing uncertainty.

This is a difficult task to show the mismatch we can create between our natural ways of thought and our presentation of data which is mostly based on models useful for highly-trained academics – even when that data is presented in a daily newspaper. It’s this mismatch that he sees in the results of many psychologists and other researchers who seem to have found solid evidence that human beings don’t think in well-formed rational ways, at least not when it comes to numbers, and specifically that human beings don’t think in Bayesian ways. For those who don’t know much about formal statistics, Bayesian analysis allows us to answer a question like: what is the probability that a woman has breast cancer given a positive mammogram, which might be due to the presence of cancer or it might be a false test result.

On page 122, Professor Gigerenzer notes that “Like his fellow Enlightenment probabilists, [Bayes] blurred the distinction between warranted degrees of belief and objective frequencies by trying to combine the two.” While this is true, many activities in the world don’t have clean statistics as do many medical applications, and even there, initial probabilities for a new technology, or a new disease, might well require such a blending. For example, an insurance underwriter might be able to figure out the size of loss distribution for a new venture, such as commercial research labs in space, but he’ll have no data for the frequency of various sorts of loss, total or partial – none have yet occurred for commercial labs in space. Underwriters in that situation would consult engineers, perhaps surveying them for their best guesses. Some would also bias estimates to produce prices which might draw accounts if they feel that’s a good business to be in for the long run. Others might bias estimates to a conservative level to protect financial assets allocated to this new venture. To the extent possible, actual results would replace those best guesses over time, but sometimes this isn’t possible to any great extent.

In any case, Gigerenzer takes on the medical cases in a clear way, providing us with a frightening picture of the confused information and advice
sometimes provided by counselors for HIV infection tests and also breast cancer tests. This is partly because the information about “chances of having breast cancer given a positive mammogram”, “chances of producing a positive mammogram if she doesn’t have breast cancer”, and so forth are given in the abstract form of probability ratios or percentages. Too often, counselors and then clients are given a set of abstract numbers which seem to say, quite wrongly, that a positive test result indicates breast cancer is almost certainly present. In fact, a positive test result indicates the need for one or more tests, perhaps a different test and perhaps an independent repeat of the same test.

Gigerenzer produces information showing that even doctors sometimes don’t understand and usually can’t communicate what these ratios mean. This is understandable. I took several courses on applied statistics and the theory of probability in college and I found my skills for reading abstract statistical information to be rusty when I was reading these articles.

Professor Gigerenzer contends we deal best, at least most easily, with information of the sort presented to our ancestors in the environments in which human beings evolved. Basically, this refers to the fact that apes can count, though even simple arithmetic skills of the sort needed in book-keeping or filling out tax forms is not really so natural to us. When we’re tempted to be too pessimistic about the ability of the human being to adjust to new conditions in time-spans far shorter than those of evolutionary biology, we should realize that most of us can carry out complicated and ‘unnatural’ tasks such as filling out confusing forms though those sorts of tasks were well beyond most highly competent and well-educated men just a few centuries ago.

In the breast-cancer example, counselors and clients alike can understand the situation far better if they’re given not abstract percentages but rather information in the form:

1. Out of 1,000 women, 10 will have breast cancer and 8 of those will have positive mammograms; and

2. Out of the remaining 990 women, 95 will have positive mammograms.

With information presented thus, most medical personnel can reason and explain that the percentage of women who have cancer given a positive mammogram is $8/(8 + 95)$. Or, more directly, 103 of the 1,000 women will
have positive mammograms and 8 of those will actually have breast cancer: 7.8%. This is apparently a realistic example for actual breast cancer tests and a typical population of women being tested. The odds of having breast cancer given a positive result might be much higher for women from high-risk groups, such as some family lines or ethnic groups which carry genes predisposing the women to breast cancer. This can be seen easily by just increasing the 8 to, say, 25. The chances of actually having breast cancer given a positive mammogram rises from 7.8% to 20.8%.

When the data was given in the less natural form of ratios and conditional probabilities, even doctors estimated that the chances of a woman having breast cancer given a positive mammogram would be about 70% rather than 7.8%. There is a very similar situation for tests for HIV infections when the test population is at low-risk for the infection: such as white, heterosexual males. There’s reason to believe that some not even infected with HIV may have committed suicide after positive test results when they weren’t even infected with HIV. This is not a conclusive argument against having the tests, because they generally screen those in low-risk populations who need further testing. When it comes to high-risk populations, a positive result for HIV usually means that the client is infected. A similar statement might be appropriate for tests of breast cancer in high-risk populations: those women carrying genes predisposing them to breast cancer. The final results of a good testing program should be pretty accurate.

As I noted in my book, (To See a World in a Grain of Sand [3]): our minds are shaped in response to our environments but that shaping has occurred both in the evolutionary history of our race and also in the development of a single human being. I’m probably far more optimistic than most evolutionary theorists about the possibility that the human mind has become an entity that can transcend its evolutionary past so that the entire universe can become its true home – at least in principle, though no particular human mind can actually achieve this state, at least not on this side of the grave. In any case, we have to work hard to develop our own minds properly in a complex world and we have to work smart to develop minds which evolved to meet the needs of apish creatures during the New Stone Age. If there is truth in Gigerenzer’s research programs on the human mind and also in my philosophical exploration of the human mind, then our thinking is a matter of interaction with our environments or with the universe or world as a whole. We’re not computing machines somehow independent of the world and taking in data for that world, data which
we process while isolated from that world, data which leads to understandings of the world which imply there is some textbook to be written which explains that same world. Take the trouble to unbundle the complex interactions of the previous sentence. It not only implies a research program of the sort Gigerenzer is carrying out, it also implies the ways in which we can understand the Creator through His natural revelations and those are ways in which we can also imitate Him.

In any case, we’re creating physical technologies, social structures, and minds-capes which are different from anything we are naturally equipped to handle. And, yet, few there are, even among those anxious to be leaders, who will take the trouble to understand the great possibilities and dangers we’re creating for ourselves and for future generations.
5 Is Christian Morality a Natural Morality?

I’m thinking my way towards the sort of intentional view of moral nature pioneered by St. Thomas Aquinas. There is a clear explanation of intentionality, a biological concept to match our biological natures, in How Brains Make Up Their Minds 2 by the neuroscientist Walter J. Freeman. Sticking strictly to the empirical aspects of this concept, Freeman provides a sharp and plausible summary of the Thomistic position on moral intention. I’ll provide a somewhat lengthy quote from his book:

I want to describe a neural basis for goal-directed actions that is common to both humans and other animals because it reflects the evolution of human mechanisms from simpler animals in which intent can operate without will. The concept – “intentionality” – was first described by St. Thomas Aquinas in 1272 to denote the process by which humans and other animals act in accordance with their own growth and maturation. An intent is the directing of an action toward some future goal that is defined and chosen by the actor. It differs from a motive, which is the reason and explanation of the action, and from a desire, which is the awareness and experience stemming from the intent. A man shoots another with the intent to kill, which is separate from why he does it and with what feeling.

Lawyers following in the steps of Aquinas understand and use these distinctions. Psychologists commonly do not. Philoso-
phers have drastically changed the meaning of the term, using intention to denote the relations that a thought or a belief has to whatever it signifies in the world, but physicians and surgeons, again following Aquinas, have preserved the original sense in applying the word to the processes of growth and healing of the body from injuries, thus retaining its original biological context. I believe that animals have awareness, but not awareness of themselves, which is well developed only in humans. Self-awareness is required for volition: animals cannot volunteer.

There seems to be a deep problem here for any claim that there is some natural law which describes the same moral standards as the Sermon on the Mount. The problem is that the world is a story where a character inside that story can’t see the point of it all yet. From inside the world, we see developments and evolutionary movements which seem to imply much but that much is seen as through a glass darkly. From a natural viewpoint, the purposes of God which would tell the endpoint of the story are often unclear. To see God’s purposes even vaguely, we must have faith and a knowledge of Holy Scripture and also of the reliable commentaries upon that Scripture. (There are, of course, those of simple faith but they need reliable teachers and preachers.) For now, I’ll just discuss the inadequacy of natural-law reasoning to develop the fullness of the Christian moral belief that remains embedded in much of the political and social and moral beliefs professed in the modern West, though no longer practiced. It’s hardly surprising that we no longer stand upon what seem unfounded beliefs – who wants to walk out onto thin air?

I don’t doubt the value of natural-law reasoning. After all, much of my efforts are in the related area of natural theology. On the other hand, my efforts are regulated by God’s direct revelations especially those which come from the Gospels, from the story of the incarnate Son of God. I can use mathematics and physics and biology to describe the universe as a story centered upon the Son of God, but I can’t find a description of the Incarnation or the Crucifixion in the formation of a star nor in the evolutionary story of the human race. True natural law reasoning could see the importance of the instinct found in many species: don’t kill a member of your own species. But that instinct isn’t absolute, though awfully strong in some species such as the wolf.
I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: so far as honest natural-law reasoning goes, the virtuous pagans of the Roman Republic and like-minded virtuous pagans in other societies were as good as it gets. Those Romans knew abortion was murder but were willing to abort babies to solve a difficult problem. Being honest and insightful, they knew that laws – such as don’t murder other human beings – were strong guidelines rather than absolutes. That’s all that we get from nature and from well-developed human reason untutored by revelation – strong guidelines.

That points to the error in those claims I remember from years ago that the Ten Commandments were a version of Hammurabi’s Code supplemented by a few religious rules. So far as I know, the Ten Commandments were the first absolute laws of that sort in history. The prophets, Amos and Isaiah and the rest, emphasized God’s raising of natural law guidelines to absolutes as part of their call for the Israelites to re-turn to God. In His various parables, and especially in The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ went beyond the prophets to new absolutes. Going well beyond the absolute prohibition of murder, the Lord Jesus Christ forbade us to have so much as a violent thought against another human being. For some reason, many non-Christians of the West have assumed those commandments, so poorly practiced even by believers, are somehow natural – either to be found by difficult intellectual effort or even by untutored exercise of human instincts. It’s far stranger that so many highly regarded Christian thinkers seem to make this error.
6 Mind: Use It or Lose It

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand*, http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=102. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/10/06.]

Here is an interesting quote from Walter J. Freeman’s *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [2]:

The competition for synaptic space is intense, and success in finding and maintaining a connection depends on the synapses being active. If they are inactive, owing to damage or disuse, the connections decay and the synapses disappear. Even the neurons may vanish. The health of neural connections in old age, like muscles, requires exercise. The lifelong growth and the maintenance of active connections provide the basis for learning, remembering, and adapting through modifications of the numbers and strengths of synapses, and they require daily exercise. [page 40]

This book had helped to form my ideas on this subject. So it’s no coincidence that I’ve said similar things from my own perspective.
7 A Thomistic Take on Madness and Modernism

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, To See a World in a Grain of Sand, http://loydf.wordpress.com/?p=107. It was finished and uploaded on 2007/11/27.]

schizophrenia a psychotic disorder characterized by loss of contact with environment and by disintegration of personality.

Schizophrenia is a horrible disease, one in which the victim loses contact with reality even in its most immediate form – that victim’s environment. In Madness and Modernism, the psychologist and polymath Louis A. Sass has proposed that the mental and emotional symptoms of schizophrenia bear eerie similarity to the styles of literature and art and thought in this modern era.

Modern art and literature and thought is, like schizophrenia, “characterized by loss of contact with environment.” Arguably, there is also a disintegration of personality in modern men and women who often try hard to be original and unique and interesting but those efforts fall flat, especially the efforts of those wretched adolescents that we worship as celebrities. We have lost contact with our environments, hence with reality, despite our delusions to being enlightened and open-minded creatures basking in the light of historical knowledge and other forms of disciplined empirical knowledge – science. Our enlightenment comes entirely from inside our minds, and especially from inside the minds of our false gurus, politicians and businessmen as well as philosophers and novelists and painters.

Modern art and literature and thought come from our engagement with our own thoughts and dreams as if they were some sort of higher reality which can be immediately deployed to understand and even judge what lies
outside of us, without further perception of our environments or further development of our minds. We have lost contact with our environments. We don’t actively and honestly engage our environments, let alone the greater universe shown to us by modern physics and mathematics or the greater Creation shown to us by the Bible and Christian liturgy and prayer. Some Christian theologians and clergymen lessen the damage to their minds and the minds of their followers by holding to the revealed truth which is our Lord Jesus Christ, but then leave those minds stunted by inadequate formulations of that truth. They insist on adhering to ancient or Medieval statements of the revealed truth which rely on the no-longer plausible empirical knowledge and speculative knowledge of earlier centuries.

I’m returning to lines of thought which inspired some novelistic efforts on my part after reading Professor Sass’s book circa 1996. Those lines of thought influenced all the novels I was writing at that time and since then, even when those novels dealt with human characters more sane than those who have formed the modern age – and we should remember that there have been many such sane inhabitants of the modern age and there are still many but those many have been overwhelmed by the self-deluded founders of modern culture and politics.

These old lines of thought are also new lines of thought because I’ve changed a lot over the past decade and my thinking has matured into an updated version of Thomistic Existentialism. I knew back then that we’re physical creatures being born, or still-born, in this phase of God’s Creation. Now I know more explicitly that our minds are shaped by our responses to our environments, to our universe, and to God’s world. To see God’s world as clearly as possible, we should ascend through an honest perception of first our environments, then the universe as seen by the best empirical knowledge of our age, and finally the revelations which are our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is, of course, an idealized schema presented to understand our relationship to God and His Creation. We should be exposing ourselves and our children to ‘God-thought’ well before any mature understanding of modern empirical knowledge is possible. That understanding will likely come for most only after modern culture, in its popular forms, is impregnated by that knowledge and, right now, modern culture only reflects a corrupted, science-fantasy view of physical science, a morally corrupted and utilitarian view of biological science, and a view of history and literature intended to justify the assumptions and presumptions of the modern mainstream.
Given those heavy qualifications, we should still try to ascend to God through the Almighty’s Creation, guided by the Lord’s direct revelations, most especially that perfection of revelation Who was our Lord Jesus Christ. At all stages of this ascent, we should be allowing those perceptions to shape our minds. The biological aspects of this process are discussed, in a partially veiled way, in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and in a way that will be more clear to modern readers in *How Brains Make Up Their Minds* [2] by the brain-scientist and philosopher Walter J. Freeman. In retrospect, I can see that Louis Sass spoke much of well-developed minds by speaking of minds which failed to develop properly because they were the minds of human beings who failed to forthrightly engage their environments – because of medical problems or because of choices which deform their own minds and moral natures, even their physical selves when we see a physical human being in the context of his environment.

This developmental process begins with active perceptual engagements with what lies around us and continues with an openness to the order in those environments. That openness will lead to a corresponding shaping of our minds. Unfortunately, the process can go on when the baby is born into a perverse society which teaches him to close his mind to love or to empirical knowledge. Openness on the part of the baby will lead him to a state of closed-mindedness.

More interestingly, the process of forming a well-developed mind proceeds as a supplementary process to the major process of forming a human person, a biological creature who is subjected to a higher moral order – the peace of Christ. In other words, he develops towards a Christ-like state of being and that process of development depends more upon participation in worship and prayer than upon ‘good intentions’ or ‘consciousness’ in moral decisions. That process of development is better seen as a slow journey to God, one step at a time, than as a sudden conversion based upon some conscious decision. Modern science would even indicate that revival-tent conversions are brought about by heightened hormone levels and irritated nervous systems and the conscious acceptance of salvation follows after the converted one is halfway up to the preacher’s dais.

Brain-scientists have proven what Aquinas and some other pre-modern thinkers saw by general observation, what has been denied by the dominant thinkers of the modern world. In modern terms, the conscious regions of our brain aren’t involved in our moral actions until those actions have already begun.
Freeman has speculated quite reasonably that those conscious regions of our brain, and the conscious aspects of our minds, have the power to censor or veto action as it is beginning. I would add, and perhaps Freeman meant to imply this, that our conscious selves can help direct our future development so that we act in particular ways in the future. Moral intentions precede conscious efforts but those conscious efforts can help shape our future intentions by changing our state of being which is the true foundation of our actions.

I think it’s obvious that practitioners of modern art and literature and thought share with schizophrenics (as well as those with schizoid personality disorders which are not schizophrenia but share some symptoms) the tendency to lead with the conscious parts of their minds. I think this is a different version of the claim of Sass that victims of schizophrenia aren’t mentally incompetent so much as they are mentally over-active. The entire world becomes just so many puzzles to be solved by a finite number of mental rules manipulating mental entities which have doubtful validity in the real world. Modern thinkers, artists, and writers are like schizophrenics in that they treat reality as no more than the source of information to be processed in their over-active, but usually shallow, minds.

It’s important to realize that schizophrenics are trapped in their disease while many modern men, at least those who have set the trends of modernism, have willfully chosen to turn inward, relying on their own dreams rather than letting their minds be formed by the reality around them. Schizophrenia is a brutal disease in which the brain’s physical activities are deeply disordered in certain ways. That it so closely resembles modern, rationalistic art, literature, and thought seems surprising.

But should we be surprised? Schizophrenics have some sort of neurochemical disorder that prevents them from engaging the world in a forthright way, the first step of shaping our minds properly – that is, shaping our minds in response to our environments first of all, then to the universe as described by the best of empirical knowledge, and then to the world which is the universe seen in light of the moral order which is the manifestation of God’s purposes for this phase of Creation. God’s purposes relate to His own pleasure in Creation but that pleasure mostly comes from His telling a story in which the Son accepts death as an act of love for the Father and, secondarily, a story in which companions for the Son are born and shaped.
We should be frightened and embarrassed that our minds have been shaped by exposure to art and literature and thought which arises out of the delusions of men who really didn’t want to accept the reality around them, either the inadequate, but real, truth of the pagan’s Nature or the plenitude of the Christian’s Creation.

We are all schizophrenics now.

We all live inside ourselves, projecting our increasingly uniform delusions onto our environments. We decide what reality should be, and then make pitiful efforts to impose our delusions upon the reality of this phase of God’s Creation. A neuro-chemical imbalance in schizophrenics. A moral failing in modern men.
8 New Forms of Human Mind and New Forms of Human Civilization

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, Acts of Being, found at http://loydfueston.com/?p=205. It was finished and uploaded on 2008/10/08.]

Recently, I had reason to refer to Michael Polanyi’s Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy [7], a book which had a good deal of influence upon my thoughts, upon my views of how human beings are embodied creatures and not body-soul chimeras and also upon my views of the way that human beings are embedded in Creation. Polanyi saw with great clarity the way in which tools become parts of our bodies when we use them often and with attention. A surgeon reaches the point where the scalpel is an extension of his arm and hand rather than a fully external tool. I would go even beyond what I remember of Polanyi’s ideas in proposing that this is a necessary result if the human mind is shaped by responses to its environment.

When I say the mind is shaped by responses to its environment, I mean that it takes knowledge and skills which are manifest in Creation into itself and reshapes itself as a manifestation of that knowledge and those skills. When a mathematician acquires the knowledge and skills of a field of study, such as group theory, that becomes an actual part of his mind in a way even more intimate that the scalpel to the surgeon becomes a part of his hand.

This implies a radically different view of what mind is, what thought is, what knowledge is, than the view that mind is some sort of software residing in wetware. I don’t intend to survey theories of the mind, and haven’t enough historical knowledge to do so, but I’ll mention that the
‘software-view’ and other views see mind as some sort of agent which exists independently of the knowledge and skills which it ‘processes’. Moreover, though modern thinkers tend to be realistic about mind being embodied, they still escape to certain forms of dualism which are forced by the desire to see truths as transcendental to the stuff of this universe or to all of Creation if they deign to admit the existence a greater reality. Truths are not part of reality in any way that might leave them as ‘mere’ manifestations. To these thinkers, even God can neither create truths nor even select truths appropriate to a specific Creation. Truth to tell, they wish to judge the world by their standards rather than shape themselves to the standards of that world. And so the game goes on…

So where does truth reside? I claim:

Things are true and truths are thing-like.

Dualism is to be destroyed, and unity restored to Creation, not by reducing all to matter nor by idealizing all to spirit but rather by seeing the stuff of Creation in different terms. I don’t know exactly what those terms are, though I’ve spoken of matter as ‘frozen soul’ – as one example – to reorient the poets who might invent new words and concepts which could then be defined more rigorously by the metaphysicians.

We need new wine in new wineskins. We don’t need to be spending our time criticizing old wine or old wineskins. After all, new wines aren’t made by mixing something new into an old wine.

A certain amount of criticism of old ways of thought is necessary and there’s much good to be found in the works of the thinkers of earlier centuries. I’ve learned much from Aquinas as one example, but the greatest of his teachings about efforts to understand Creation – including man – is:

Let your mind be shaped by actively responding to reality.

There are problems with such a simple statement but most of them can be resolved by an understanding of the slow and painful processes of the evolution of the human race to a state where the brain had properties allowing the development of a mind which could be shaped by responses which go beyond our immediate environment and by an understanding of the roughly analogous processes by which a human mind can be shaped by responses to its environments or by responses to much more if that mind
is educated in a tradition which includes the likes of Homer, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Moses Maimonides, St. Thomas Aquinas, Gottfried Leibniz, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, William Blake, Albert Schweitzer, Albert Einstein, and so forth. And I’ve forgotten to mention a single musician or dancer or visual artist or athlete or statesman.

Rich cultures make for rich opportunities for human minds to be shaped to encompass far more than the furniture and the trees, not that I despise solid and comfortable furniture or grand old trees.

But there’s a nonlinear complexity involved in this business of cultures and minds. At any one slice of time, it seems to me that minds shape culture and culture tells minds how to move, to paraphrase John Wheeler’s words about space (culture) and matter (mind). But, over time, culture has shaped minds and cultures formed by early men who left no evidence of mind as we think of it, with abstract reasoning skills, eventually gave rise to the likes of the pre-Socratic philosophers and Archimedes, as well as Isaiah and the anonymous geniuses who wrote the early, foundational works of Hinduism. Men who could see the possibilities of tools after noticing the occasional sharp edge on a rock, men who could learn how to build magnificent pyramids by trial-and-error processes, produced an evolving culture that eventually produced mind-ed men who could design tools from fabricated materials and could build a Brooklyn Bridge after a complex planning process involving community leaders and local businessmen as well as engineers and contractors.

There’s much talk now about the incoherence in our culture, talk which preceded a general awareness of the economic fragility of modern societies. I’ll throw in a personal note at this point:

One reason I was willing to take the chances which led to a long and ongoing period of little or no income is that I was an actuary and understood the problems caused by our making extravagant promises to ourselves at the expense of future generations, but few would listen to me or to those who knew more than me about the various problems in our ways of organizing our personal and communal lives.

Yet, there’s something far bigger going on, bigger than even our financial meltdown, bigger than the more important meltdown of a manufacturing economy that seems to assume that consumers need 10,000 square foot
houses to hold ever more television sets and clothes and shoes and refrigerators, bigger even than the moral decay caused by the Gresham’s law analogue which tells us cheap and mindless entertainment will drive out community orchestras and children’s dance recitals and quiet nights reading middle-brow historical novels or even demanding books of literature or science or history. We’ve lost our old relationship to Creation and haven’t yet succeeded in forming a new relationship. We’re at the cusp of a civilization change – or a possible disastrous failure to move into a new phase of Western civilization.

And we may fail. Creative minds profound enough to shape new phases of a civilizations or even a more radically new civilization don’t form that often, not for lack of ‘raw’ human material but rather for lack of the courage and faith to respond to God’s Creation. We seek to hold onto what was good even when it shows itself to be inadequate for understanding new opportunities or problems, inadequate for proposing creative responses to those opportunities or problems.

Our traditions would form our minds in inappropriate ways if we let them. For those who have some knowledge of differential geometry – and mine is currently light-weight – there is a possible metaphor:

The world is a complex manifold, a very convoluted geometrical structure of many dimensions.

The human mind is formed by response to that manifold but indirectly as the minds of all but the greatest creators respond to some version of a chart to which that manifold is mapped. Even those greatest creators respond mostly to some pre-existing chart.

For those who know still less than me about this field of mathematics which is very important in modern understandings of physical reality: an example of a manifold might be the surface of the earth and a chart would be the result of one of several major ways of mapping the sphere of a surface to a flat surface which might be more useful for navigation or other purposes. An atlas, or collection of such maps or charts, can help much in understanding the peoples or physical features of the earth as a whole or of the northern Atlantic.

We in the West currently have various charts which don’t correspond well to our current knowledge of the world. We make our plans and try to
organize our lives using charts with vast empty or mislabeled regions though those regions have been explored by historians or biologists or physicists in the centuries since those older charts were put to paper and to mind. This is not just a matter of inadequate or wrong knowledge. Our minds are misshaped because we’ve shaped them to knowledge no longer plausible given the empirical knowledge which we notice only when it appears in glossy form in a televised documentary. Those bits of information from an hour-long documentary which crushes decades of thought and many pages of physics and mathematics and chemistry into pictures of events in the universe when it was only thousands of years into its current stage of expansion. The pictures rest uneasily on the surfaces of minds shaped to far less refined understandings of the universe.

Though our all-too human minds shape themselves by responding to our environments or even the entire universe, they’re shaped first by responses to our mothers and to the culture into which we’re born. Our minds are shaped by our teachers who expound specific formulations of established knowledge. Moreover, few minds are flexible enough to actually shape themselves to new knowledge, especially when it’s not only so voluminous but also so much in conflict with much established knowledge.

Much of this seems familiar if we try to see it in light of standard analyses of our moral and cultural crises. By doing this, we think about the human mind in non-Thomistic terms, that is, we think as if the human mind is something given and it will work correctly in any given circumstances (at least on earth) so long as it’s given good data and has learned proper rules of reasoning. I’m saying our minds are plain and simply shaped wrong, though there are undoubtedly some which are shaped in a somewhat more appropriate way.

There are many who’ve seen this, including those such as Nietzsche who failed to come up with a positive understanding of man and his world to replace the modern liberal (individualistic) understanding which he had demolished. As one example of a man who chose to travel better paths into more coherent regions fair, Alasdair MacIntyre’s analyses of our modern moral problems seem perfectly consistent with my analysis, perhaps because he has also been strongly influenced by the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas on human nature and moral nature in particular. (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alasdair_MacIntyre) There is deeper meaning than some realize in MacIntyre’s claim that we can’t resolve some of our moral conflicts, such as abortion, because the major groups of oppo-
CHAPTER 8. NEW FORMS OF HUMAN MIND

ments each use words and hold concepts which don’t allow deeper communication of the opposing views. They have mapped the world to different charts and have no willingness, perhaps no capability, to evaluate their own charts or those of opponents.

There have also been plenty of men with sensitive souls united to powerful minds who’ve lived during times of breakdown or during interludes between phases of a civilization and those, such as St. Augustine, have left us words which tell us they knew that something was happening which was beyond the reach of even their powerful minds. It was beyond the reach of those minds because of the opaqueness with which future possibilities present themselves – but they do present themselves at least in a vague form. The manifold which was the reality of that world had proven itself to be shaped in such a way that the existing charts for mapping that world were clearly inadequate. So to speak.

This will be one characteristic of the new civilization:

The gods will die to be replaced by different metaphors and analogies, drawn from differential geometry or the theory of random numbers or morally well-ordered narratives of human history or poems about pretty young women understood in the context of human evolution.

In an address to philosophers given on June 7, 2008, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of modernity as demanding a “more exact understanding of the nature of man”, but that will be only a part of a more exact understanding of all of Creation which is subject to our exploration and analysis – see Broadening the Horizons of Reason at [http://loydfueston.com/?p=159](http://loydfueston.com/?p=159). If Western Civilization survives in an offspring or a new phase, that more exact understanding will be founded, partly, upon ways of thinking and speaking which draw upon such esoteric fields as differential geometry. We won’t see the end of faith nor of literature nor of philosophy but we will see them re-founded as we are forced to view Creation as it is and not as our ancestors were viewed it in terms of their knowledge of empirical reality. Of course, we must remember that the early Hebrew prophets had to fight against the ingrained assumptions of various forms of nature-worship, as did the early Greek philosophers and scientists.

The truths that will remain unaltered are those which the transcendent God revealed about Himself, but even our relationship to that God might
change as we are part of Creation and our understanding of Creation will be changing. We may be willing to see this world as a story God is telling for His own purposes and we may be able to work for God and for our fellow-men while accepting the pittance or the great wealth which God bestows upon us.
9 The Disembodiment of Knowledge in Modern America

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, Acts of Being, found at http://loydfueston.com/?p=598. It was finished and uploaded on 2009/09/21.]

Human knowledge is embodied knowledge, embodied in the relationships of brain-cells to one another and groups of brain-cells to one another as well as being embodied in the habits of our muscles and peripheral nerves and also in our clothing and our houses and our tools and machines, in our ways of making our livings and of governing ourselves or being governed, in our ways of worshiping God and paying respect to human excellence. A fuller description would take a large book without even attempting to speak of particular realizations in concrete human beings and their communities, though it’s actually a multitude of particular realizations which allow us to abstract properly to a wider view of human possibilities. Even when it comes to our own efforts to improve our practices and artifacts, we don’t know much about human possibilities until we study what we’ve done and what others have done.

Much of our knowledge is embodied in the form of communities and their practices and attitudes, within political or economic marketplaces and within the parts of our lives we live in our smaller and more private communities. Our community relationships include the ways in which we entertain ourselves, the ways in which we sing or tell stories. They include our ways of raising children or caring for the elderly in our families or in our larger-scale communities. Certainly, a human being or a human community can be the very embodiment of falsehoods which can even be held strongly in the face of conflicting evidence from reality. A human being or a human community will necessarily be an incomplete or insufficiently rich embodiment of
Creation since we’re finite beings exploring God’s manifested thoughts, but even the simplest of human beings is a character in a complex tapestry of stories which are threads and others which are pictures formed by groups of these threads and so forth.

I’ve rejected the modern separation of the knowledge of concrete and abstract realms and I’m trying to follow some of the implications. In a sense, I’ve returned to the ancient view in which “to know your wife” is to be physically intimate with her. Knowledge of your wife is inseparable from marital relationships. Take this not as an argument that marital, or other human relationships, are purely physical in a reductionistic sense but rather a denial that there is a dualism between concrete being and abstractions. The purest of loves is driven by hormonal flows, even maternal love is painfully intensified by the flows of hormones as a newborn is put to the breast of her mother. Concrete being is particularized but is shaped from abstract being which I regard as manifested truths. Concrete and abstract stuff is a manifestation of thoughts of God. Much of concrete being can be understood, at a first shot, as the thoughts of God as storyteller while the abstract being can be understood as the thoughts of God as mathematician and physicist, as chemist and biologist, but as a Creator not as a student of what already exists.

Human knowledge is the result of human explorations of being in its concrete and abstract forms and human struggles to make sense of it. It is our efforts to think the thoughts of God in His role as Creator. We human beings were given the gift of a freedom to shape our thoughts to encapsulate God’s revelations, those which He manifested in Creation and also the few revelations about His transcendent Being. That freedom also extends to the shaping of the human parts of the world, the parts of the world which can be labeled ‘non-human’ over which we exercise proper and improper forms of stewardship as well as the ‘human’ parts such as human political and economic structures. We can embody not only tentative knowledge which will eventually be proven wrong or prove to be in need of enrichment of some sort, we can even embody inconsistent knowledge. It might be an effort to combine two incompatible ways of thought or to justify an incompatibility between a way of thought and a way of living. An example which has elements of all of the above might be seen in the case of those Christians who claim to accept some form of evolutionary theory, man evolved from a more primitive sort of ape, and then also claim to accept an interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve as being a fall from a state of grace – presumably
something like a state of spiritual and moral purity. We rise as physical beings but started high and fell as spiritual and moral beings – not very plausible.

On the other side, we can take those scientistic human beings who take certain conclusions from some science, often evolutionary biology, and raise those conclusions to the status of absolutely true dogmas. The open-mindedness of science is no part of the thinking processes or general attitudes of such thinkers, a group which may include some serious and well-known scientists.

Currently, the political and social and moral discourse of modern Americans and most other human beings – in fact, discourse in all matters important, is at the level of sulking 8 year-olds speaking, and often yelling, at each other from the safety of their own poorly formed minds. This is partly a reflection of the low moral and intellectual caliber of those who dominate the public marketplaces of ideas in an age of decadent barbarism but it’s also a reflection of the state of human knowledge at the level of our entire race. If we try to see human knowledge as some sort of coherent whole, we are most likely to fail, for we’ve fragmented our knowledge, composing a discordant polyphony made up in many of its parts of screeches and howls and the random noises of mechanized human communities without a moral purpose and without a sense of beauty or truth, without a sense of the truth and beauty embodied in God’s Creation, in the stars and mountains, in the equations which describe certain aspects of those stars and mountains and the interrelationships of those creatures with the rest of Creation, in a Bach cantata or a Gaelic air, in a two year-old girl who’s such a remarkable mix of grace and clumsiness. We see the clumsiness and the incompleteness often enough ugly in a brutal way and we interpret it as a variety of oppositions between mere matter and higher entities, between the practical and the ideal, between God and Satan, failing to see the world as a story being told by an all-powerful and all-loving God.

Knowledge is embodied because we are creatures of a particular and concrete universe. What we can know truly is embodied, even the most abstract of mathematical truths is drawn from particular relationships within this world of embodiment. The processes of human knowledge-making involve eyes and hands, feet and hearts, brains most of all. Human knowledge isn’t true knowledge as much as it’s a dynamic movement towards true knowledge so long as we respond honestly and courageously to God’s Creation. Truth is embodied and so is beauty, however much they’re also incomplete
and dynamically developing towards the truths and beauties which are the end result of the story which God is telling in this concrete world. Progress is clearly not guaranteed but seems to be real on a large enough scale and there are hints of a true progress which we Christians would call the Resurrection. If there was a fall, it came as God Himself shaped unblemished abstraction into concrete and bleeding forms of being which He uses to tell a story in which we play a part, as do the stars and flu viruses and giant squids, but this is a fall with a moral purpose of creating a world which is really a story in which the main event is the self-sacrifice of the Son of God as an act of pure love for His Father, an event in which we play a subsidiary role but one in which we gain a chance for a share in divinity.

If there’s a fall in which man played a direct role, it’s an ongoing fall consisting of man’s indulgence in the human temptation to separate being into components which are at odds with each other. Matter vs. spirit. Brain vs. mind. Body vs. soul. The practical vs. the ideal.

We’re at a crisis point now, where the dominant country, the United States, seems to be actively opposed to reality, despising the embodied beauty and truth of God’s Creation as not being good enough for us Americans and any others decent enough to be like us. It’s been said that the United States is the first country to move directly from barbarism to decadence without passing through a state of civilization. I’d claim that Americans bypassed the state of civilization because, led by those such as Emerson who thought to create ideals more wonderful than what is embodied in this Creation, we decided to try to implement our so-called ideals rather than to study reality and to try to do better within that reality, including Western Civilization. Hermann Melville thought Emersonian thought to be a spiritualized materialism and feared many, perhaps most, Americans shared this morally diseased outlook of Emerson and Thoreau. Melville was close. Far too many Americans are deeply diseased in this way including nearly all of our political and intellectual and religious leaders going back to at least the leaders of the New England Colonies during the King Phillip’s War – see The Need for Abstractions in Moral Self-understanding at http://loydfueston.com/?p=526 for a discussion of the need to properly deal with particular and concrete realizations of human ways of life to be able to form abstract ideas of better possibilities. I would suggest one change to Melville’s formulation: this Emersonian-American way of thought is not so much a spiritualized materialism as a nightmarish replacement for all that is embodied in a material world. If the world won’t be what we
Americans want it to be, we’ll still act as if it were truly what we want it to be. That strategy was remarkably successful in many ways for more than three centuries, but reality is now biting back.

We can see the American disrespect for reality in the claim made by that anonymous figure in the Bush II government that they would make reality rather than study it. We can see this disrespect for reality in the words and actions of the Kennedy and Johnson government figures in their waging of the Vietnam war where it was most important to get on board, to sign on to the dream that the United States could shape South Vietnam into a real country, an exotic outpost of the United States. We can see it in the more recent wars against Iraq where the fact that American soldiers were in place, in a far-away country, killing Iraqis and being killed by Iraqis means that those Iraqis – at least some – are evil men intent on destroying us because we’re so wonderful. Start a war by invading a country on false pretenses and then convince yourself that the fact you’re killing citizens of that country means they’re evil and deserved to be killed. This is actually another symptom of the same disease that leads us to declare that a movie that’s esthetic and moral trash must be good if Americans like it. Surely, it’s worthy of an Oscar so we can advertise to the world and to our ancestors how empty of mind and soul we are.

By such paths, we traveled from a barbarism with at least some respect for the works of Western civilization imported from Europe to a decadence that respects only transactions in public marketplaces, transactions that typically represent only the satisfaction of cheap and uneducated desires. We admire the athletes of football and boxing and make fun of the athletes of ballet and opera. We admire what would have been admired by the proletariat who filled the Colosseum of ancient Rome and despise what satisfied the tastes of the 18th and 19th century men who put the final touches upon this civilization we’ve dismantled that we might build whorehouses from the stones of grand cathedrals and make bombs that destroy cathedrals and the surrounding cities from the knowledge gathered by great men of science.

It’s hard to imagine that a large population of a seemingly sophisticated country could be so detached from reality, so convinced that truth is found in their imaginations shaped to mirror their desires and even their career plans. Decades ago, some thinkers had predicted collapse of the Soviet Union because the all-important apparatchiks wouldn’t be able to function because of the strain caused by the conflict between reality and official
Soviet views of reality – this is more plausible than the view that Reagan brought down the Berlin Wall by planting the seeds that grew into the military bean-stalk currently reaching for the stars. Those who claimed Communism to be such a bad and inefficient system seemed to think it could conquer the world if we didn’t waste our children’s futures trying to get the Soviet politicians and generals to act just as stupidly.

Americans seem to be oblivious to this conflict between reality and their thoughts and feelings. The United States is collapsing, the West is falling at least partly because the United States failed in its role as a new and energetic region which could have created a new phase of Western Civilization. After all, civilizations don’t survive as truly stable entities, they evolve in place or re-develop in formerly marginal regions. It was our turn here in the United States and we had better things to do than to nurture a new civilization.

As the ruins crumble around the globe, Americans remain oblivious to reality, choosing to believe they can solve a problem of excessive debt by creating more debt, that they can make the world love them once again by waging wars on all continents and building hundreds of military bases around the world, even in regions where we’ve not yet started shooting. We think to encourage creativity by setting children and young adults in front of sheets of paper or – still worse – in front of computers when those children have little knowledge of reality and few skills for responding to reality.

I’m offering a way forward, a worldview which explicitly recognizes the unity and coherence and completion of this world and can be used to embody a plausible human knowledge of that world in a civilization not yet born and in the human beings who will inhabit that civilization. We can hope the next civilization will be an embodiment of the best of modern empirical knowledge, that is, that it will be an embodiment of that knowledge in tools and political practices, in forms of music and in goals for scientific research, disciplined to a morally responsible view of God’s Creation and man’s proper place in it. Of course, there are no guarantees from God or from His thoughts manifested as Creation. The future of this world might hold multiple civilizations in different parts of the earth or it might hold a state of permanent barbarism, poverty, and ongoing violence. The latter is the future American leaders seem intent on creating.

We’re a long way, lots of long days of work away, from a refreshed and re-energized civilization – if it comes into being, but it seems to me that
it’s time for men and women of moral integrity to recognize how much has been lost and to start the various tasks of building a better future, one that will likely be seen by no one currently alive.
10 The Shaping of the Human Mind

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, Acts of Being, found at http://loydfueston.com/?p=637. It was finished and uploaded on 2010/03/09.]

God has shaped a thing-like world out of more basic stuff, strange abstract stuff. I’ve discussed this in various ways – see Negative Theology in Physics and Metaphysics at http://loydfueston.com/?p=81 for an overview of my thoughts on abstract being as well as other issues and Not Monism and Not Dualism but Unity of Creation at http://loydfueston.com/?p=285 for a more focused discussion on abstract being.

We human beings form our minds by responding actively to that world and by penetrating to understandings of that more basic, more abstract stuff. A particular thing is a manifestation of a particular thought of God though all things in Creation are intertwined in the most complex and complicated way as William Blake told us in his efforts to see a world in a grain of sand. Each grain of sand is made of various particles made of sub-particles, each of which has peculiar properties and ways of relating to other particles or sub-particles or even other things. The particular things also have their forms of behavior and of relating to other things.

The actual situation is still more confusing. The universe is an entity with its own properties and not just a collection of stars and gases and electromagnetic fields. See A Universe is More than it Contains at http://loydfueston.com/?p=163 for a discussion of one particular problem – though energy seems to be conserved in all ‘local’ situations, it’s not necessarily conserved at the level of the universe. As Professor P.J.E. Peebles tells us in Principles of Physical Cosmology [6]:

We see that the faster decrease of [the radiation density of
a relativistic universe modeled as a gas] compared to the mass
density of a nonrelativistic gas is the result of the pressure work
done by the expanding radiation. However, since the volume
of the universe varies as [the third power of the expansion fac-
tor of the universe], the net radiation energy in a closed [and
expanding] universe decreases as [the inverse of the expansion
factor of the universe] as the universe expands. Where does the
lost energy go? Since there is no pressure gradient in the ho-
"mogeneously distributed radiation, the pressure does not act to
accelerate the expansion of the universe. (The active gravita-
tional mass due to the pressure has the opposite effect, slowing
the rate of expansion...) The resolution of this apparent para-
dox is that while energy conservation is a good local concept
... and can be defined more generally in the special case of an
isolated system in asymptotically flat space, there is not a gen-
eral global energy conservation law in general relativity theory.

I also noted in that short essay that “we don’t yet know the exact
geometric properties of the universe, or rather – the region of the universe
which is visible to us.” As a consequence we don’t really know for sure there
is a mismatch between that decrease in radiation density and the increase in
volume of the universe. The principle remains true and is clearly accepted
by the mainstream of physicists working in cosmology – Professor Peebles,
appropriately, wrote the book to reflect mainstream views and not his own
opinions on unsettled issues.

I draw a clear conclusion from this and much of the other empirical
knowledge I’ve considered in my thinking and writing: the world is not a
dualistic mish-mash of various sorts of substances, mind-soul and body in
many traditions. The world is a story God is telling with a universe He
shaped out of some strangely abstract stuff which, so to speak, lies on the
other side of the Big Bang. There might actually be many complex stages
or even a series of expansions and collapses before we could get ‘closer’ to
God’s original act-of-being by which He created from nothingness. Those
details aren’t important for now.

Human beings aren’t born with minds or souls attached to their bodies
by some mysterious glue. Human beings are born with brains which have
major regions which have the potential for abstract thinking – such as that
form of thinking which we might describe as future-oriented. Those regions are not preset to function in highly specific ways as, for example, the hippocampus is preset to form long-term memories out of short-term ones according to certain criteria. Cells in the regions of the human brain devoted to abstract thinking shape their connections to other cells in the same regions and to cells in other regions according to criteria which have been investigated by modern brain-scientists. The various writings of Gerald Edelman (see [en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Gerald_Edelman](en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Gerald_Edelman)) provide a powerful and coherent understanding of the brain’s ‘shaping’ processes.

Mozart wasn’t born a great musician, though he clearly was born with a brain that could be shaped into that of a composer who could see a piece of music in its entirety the way that we more ordinary folk can see a tree in its entirety – so long as we stand back from the tree but not too far back. Our brains can encompass only so much, too much detail can destroy the understanding as easily as can a sweeping landscape view. But even the ability to see a tree truly, in its concrete or abstract nature, comes from our active response to trees when we see them as children, perhaps under the guidance of an adult interested in nature.

God made that tree, as a poet once reminded us. The Creator made that tree by manifesting certain abstract ideas from which He shaped the basic stuff of this universe and then by manifesting the idea of certain sorts of developmental processes which formed first protons, then atoms of hydrogen and helium, then atoms of carbon and oxygen, then stars and planets, then organic chemicals, then slime-molds, then trees, and so forth.

Brilliant men of the pre-modern era somewhat wrongly shaped their minds and taught us to wrongly shape our minds because they saw that tree as a manifestation of an ideal object (to play a little loose with metaphysical language for the sake of conciseness) rather than seeing it as a dynamic object, even a character of sorts, in a stream of events. And, yet, there were also those who saw that tree as arising out of some sort of chaos and they formed an anti-metaphysics of sorts.

It would seem that God doesn’t feel bound to operate by the rules of either Plato or Heraclitus. We should honor them and see the insightfulness in their thoughts, for they were also characters in a sub-narrative of human history, a small but important story we could title: *The Development of the Human Mind at the Racial Level*. We now know enough to move on to a higher level of understanding, however inadequate it might eventually prove to be.
From the metaphysics of the Greeks, based upon very simple physics, to Augustine of Hippo who provided a substantial appreciation of the importance of time and the flow of events, through Aquinas who provided a deeper understanding of both the mind and also of being, through various modern philosopher-scientists who gave us brilliant understandings of the interaction of matter and of abstract mathematics – including Einstein and Planck and Dirac who enriched our understanding of time and space and matter and relationships, we come to us with our minds not so well shaped as they should be. We yet have trouble with these modern understandings of Creation at its concrete and abstract levels. See *Shaping Our Minds to Reality* at [http://loydfueston.com/?p=117](http://loydfueston.com/?p=117) for a discussion of this problem and the opinion of one man, both physicist and Anglican priest, that we apparently need generations to make some ideas truly our own though those ideas seem to be out there – printed in many a textbook. But some of us are trying and many seem at least willing to admit our confusion at trying to fit evolutionary concepts into brains shaped to consider species as ideal categories or to fit the theories of relativity into brains shaped to regard time as uniformly flowing in a way fully separable from space. And space itself? We naturally see it in ways which are somewhat comparable to a naive Euclideanism if not educated in pre-modern ways of thought still dominant in our age. If we are so educated, we might have more sophisticated Euclidean view. At the same time, we are exposed to newer ideas based on modern explorations of empirical reality, even when so many of us see these ideas in a relatively explicit form mostly in science fiction shows or the occasional science documentary which shows the Big Bang was just like a fireworks display. We read of conflicts between traditional moral rules and such new knowledge as the strong correlations between mutations and strong feelings of ‘transsexualism’ in some who are otherwise fully male in their genetic make-up. Many react by rejecting those traditional rules and the greater truths which lie behind them and others just try to hold on to those rules without rejecting the modern empirical knowledge which does so much to cure their cancers or to give us so much technology, life-enhancing and life-damaging alike. We want to have the old certainties and jet aircraft as well. And so...

Where is this ‘free-will’ that can overcome a creature’s own fundamental being?
Ah, the world be far more complex than the most convoluted of the sentences I’ve constructed in this book. We do need, in fact, new ways to speak of complex facts which overwhelm our language. We need musicians to compose in new ways consistent with Einstein’s insights into space-time and poets to speak of Turing’s insights into the nature of algorithmic thought.

The human mind, in its abstract aspects, is the human understanding of Creation, in all perceivable and conceivable aspects. The contents of knowledge are the container of the mind and it is shaped and filled, filled and shaped, by the quite active responses human beings make to Creation. But the very language of ‘contents’ and ‘container’ needs to be at least refreshed and maybe replaced entirely. We also have to remember the communal foundation of the human mind, but I’ll pass over that in this short article.

Let me summarize:

1. God created things as manifestations of some of His thoughts.

2. By learning to shape our brains in response to those things, we bring into being certain states of those brains which can be truly called human minds.

3. There is also knowledge which exists at a social level and, after a recent explosion of empirical knowledge, is poorly integrated into most individual minds.

And so man’s mind and the being created by God are not so readily separable. Bishop Berkeley was onto something with his insight that created things can be regarded as thoughts of God but he made the mistake of thinking human beings can directly penetrate to the thoughts manifested as substantial entities. He also seemed to think that abstractions had some sort of absolute existence independent of the thoughts of God. Moreover, he saw through – or tried to see through – those concrete things to abstract being and ended up slighting the value of concrete being.

To Berkeley, and others, there are abstract truths which form a common language for God and man, while I’m proposing that God has a language which works through and over created being both abstract and concrete. Man learns that language, trying by stages to re-create that language, by responding to God’s work as Creator.
A Speculative Framework for Understanding Mental and Emotional Illnesses

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, Acts of Being, found at http://loydfueston.com/?p=884. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/06/08.]

[In this essay, I’m suggesting a speculative framework and not any cures for these serious disorders of the human mind and soul. At the same time, this framework – if appropriate – would guide researchers and clinicians in developing palliatives or cures. Mostly, I’m pursuing my goal of understanding the human mind as the immaterial relationships a human being forms as he responds to his own body, to his physical environments, to the entire universe, and to God. Much of the framework was implied in the explanation of Thomistic intentionality in How Brains Make Up Their Minds by Walter J. Freeman. This view of intentionality as an organic growth occurring as the organism responds to its own body and to its environments was taught by St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century.]

I claim, following St. Thomas Aquinas and others, that we’re bodily creatures having immaterial aspects, such as mind-like aspects, which are formed of relationships to our environments and to still greater realms of created being understood properly or understood by way of delusions. I’m using some recent research results to ask if such problems as OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder), bipolar disease (used to be manic depression), and maybe even schizophrenia are due to not being able to properly orient ourselves in our environments, not being able to move about in a coordinated manner, not being able to make flesh-and-blood contact or even just not being able to establish eye contact with our fellow-creatures, and
so forth. This isn’t to deny that something can be wrong inside of us, but it is to raise the possibility that psychiatric and mood disorders can be caused by problems in the neuro-muscular or skeletal systems of our bodies and also to raise the possibility that they can be caused by simple problems of coordinating our perceptive or locomotive efforts. I believe they can also be caused by delusionary expectations about our own bodies or what lies around us. These delusionary expectations can arise from our culture or from our upbringing.

This sort of a view of cognitive and emotional and social problems is entirely consistent with, perhaps a necessary conclusion drawn from, my claim that men are physical creatures whose immaterial components arise from their relationships within Creation, including their relationships with God in His freely-chosen and self-constrained role as Creator.

A mouthful and one easily distorted into literalistic forms.

Let me qualify away one potential distortion. Created being lies on a spectrum from highly abstract forms – the truths manifested by God as the raw stuff of Creation – to the concrete forms of being in this universe – things and the constituents of thing-like being such as electrons and quarks. An easy way to enter into this way of thinking is to contemplate my analogical claim that thing-like being is frozen soul-stuff, where the soul-stuff lies close to that raw stuff of created being, that is, the truths manifested by God as the foundational being of Creation.

I think we do little good by talking or acting as if there were some sort of soul or mind or psyche hiding inside of that human being, whether he is as well-balanced as can be or whether he is deeply disturbed. We would do far better in understanding our own possibilities and also the troubles of disturbed human beings if we were to think of our human selves as fundamentally physical creatures which gain immaterial aspects by forming relationships with our fellow human beings, other creatures, our physical environments, the narratives in which we live, and – last but certainly not least – with the Creator who is telling these stories including the larger-scale story which is the universe as it moves towards the fulfillment of God’s purposes.

Another mouthful.

Let me get to some specific examples.
11.1 I’m washing my hands for the fifteenth time without a break; I must be obsessed with germs.

In a recently published article, *OCD: Compulsions Lead to Obsessions, Not the Other Way Around* found at [http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110523101915.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110523101915.htm), we learn that there is scientific evidence that “the behaviours themselves (the compulsions) might be the precursors to the disorder, and that obsessions may simply be the brain’s way of justifying these behaviours.” Other groups of scientists may well present counter-evidence, but I’ll take this quite plausible result as being true for now. Given my understanding of the human mind as being certain sorts of relationships we establish starting with our own selves and body parts...

We can stop there for now. When we suffer from OCD, something has been disrupted in our shaping of the mind which is capable of forming the higher and more complex habits of a human being, and most likely a few other social mammals as well. We need habits. In fact, most of our behavior, including that which is labeled ‘moral’, is made up of habits – see Is this evidence against free-will? at [http://loydfueston.com/?p=147](http://loydfueston.com/?p=147) for a discussion of evidence that our bodies start moving before there is any activity in the regions of our brain associated with abstract reasoning, planning, and other faculties related to free-will.

We form habits and my claim is that we become morally healthy human beings when we form habits and inclinations so that our bodies respond properly when, say, we hear the scream of a child in danger. We fool ourselves when we think we can make the right decision when courage or resistance to temptation is needed. There is no time and we’re very likely to freeze if we try to evaluate each situation, balancing moral demands with prudential considerations. Even in lesser situations, we have not the energy to be constantly making a conscious decision to open the door for a woman with a cane or to go back a few steps to pick up a fallen object for another woman on a walker. How about getting behind the wheel of a car after having that one drink too many? With ten beers in you, you’re probably not going to be very coherent in your moral reasoning. Should we cheat a little on that light that’s already been yellow for a couple of seconds? You have a very small fraction of a second to make that decision – those higher regions of the brain don’t work so quickly.
CHAPTER 11. UNDERSTANDING MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL ILLNESSES

Forming habits is something we do often and well. After all, we’re descended from creatures which survived and reproduced successfully because of good, or at least adequate, habit-formation. When it comes to habit-formation, the difference between human beings and other higher animals, such as bears, is that human beings can take conscious control of the process, guiding it towards moral purposes and then to prudential purposes as a secondary matter.

We shape ourselves by responding to our own bodies and our immediate environment. This shaping results in habits of various sorts, such as those of cleanliness. If something goes wrong, a brain-circuit is set up in our motion control systems and signals continue to flow. We stand at the bathroom sink and wash our hands over and over and over again. Our higher brain regions come into play, justifying this strange behavior by generating a fear of germs or dirt. What should happen is that our higher brain regions should come into play to censor our behavior and cut off the handwashing at a reasonable point – some say they were taught to sing the chorus to Happy Birthday three times as they washed their hands, not 100 times. If the victims of these compulsions were to have a better understanding of the way that human beings form habits, they might be able to better deal with both the wrongly formed habit and the self-justifying obsessions.

11.2 My tummy bothers me, for the tenth day in a row, and I’m grumpy. I’m settling into this rotten mood.

There are two recent studies related to this link between stomach troubles and anxiety or depression. First, in Gut Bacteria Linked to Behavior: That Anxiety May Be in Your Gut, Not in Your Head found at http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110517110315.htm we learn that “[R]esearchers at McMaster University have conclusive evidence that bacteria residing in the gut influence brain chemistry and behaviour.”

This reinforces the point that we are physical creatures. In fact, those who are old enough might have known some psychiatric patients on old-fashioned anti-depressants. Those medicines were chemical sledge-hammers which dramatically altered the balance of certain brain chemicals and it turned out that those chemicals were also used for other tasks in the human
11.2. MY TUMMY BOTHERS ME

body. For example, they helped to neutralize poisons in some of the foods we eat. Patients on those old-fashioned anti-depressants couldn’t eat aged cheeses and certain other foods unless they wished to risk death.

Can we respond to our bodies, to our friends, to the world, in a friendly manner when bacteria in our stomachs are perhaps causing us constant upset or perhaps putting bad chemicals into our bloodstreams?

So, it shouldn’t surprise us to also learn that Digestive Problems Early in Life May Increase Risk for Depression, Study Suggests. The article, found at http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110512171517.htm, tells us:

Depression and anxiety may result from short-term digestive irritation early in life, according to a study of laboratory rats by researchers at the Stanford University School of Medicine. The findings suggest that some human psychological conditions may be the result, rather than the cause, of gastrointestinal disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome.

When we’re constantly struggling against a digestive system which is not functioning quite right, we feel bad in a persistent way and we’re using a lot of energy. We might be thrown directly into a blackish mood or perhaps fall into one due to exhaustion. There are forms of exhaustion which are cleansing – such as serious physical activity after a long winter, but being constantly tired certainly leaves me feeling rotten. Let it last a year or more, and the rotten feeling might well have settled in.

In my case, I seem to fall into blackish moods, paranoia, when I’m suffering a problem, allergies or a sinus infection, which would be pumping up my histamine levels. Histamines can have a powerful effect on the brain, and the relationship to paranoid moods is certainly plausible. In addition, a constantly enraged immune system drains a lot of energy. Something common to allergies and sinus infections and colds puts me into those blackish moods, but I know the patterns even if I’m not sure of the exact cause. I adjust as well as I can for that pattern in my mood and that makes my life easier and perhaps eliminates some unpleasantness for those around me.

We’re physical creatures, but we’re called to higher moral states. This means we need to be aware of these various situations, in our own selves and in others around us, that we might provide proper moral guidance, to our own selves and to others. Once we become aware of our physical
CHAPTER 11. UNDERSTANDING MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL ILLNESSES

natures and the ways in which we form our immaterial aspects, mind-like or soul-like aspects, we become responsible for responding properly to our selves and to other creatures, to the world and to its Creator.

Know yourself if you would be a morally responsible creature. That means you should know your digestive system and your...posture?

11.3 I can’t position my body correctly and I’m out of sorts.

Because of a more complex situation, I’m going to provide a longer quote from this article, Bipolar Disorder and Postural Control: Mind-Body Connection Suggests New Directions for Treatment, Research found at [http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/1105241111349.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/1105241111349.htm):

A new study by motor control and psychology researchers at Indiana University suggests that postural control problems may be a core feature of bipolar disorder, not just a random symptom, and can provide insights both into areas of the brain affected by the psychiatric disorder and new potential targets for treatment.

Problems with balance, postural control and other motor control issues are frequently experienced by people with mood and psychiatric disorders such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, and neurological disorders such as Huntington’s and Parkinson’s disease, but research into the connections is scant.

If problems with postural control – maintaining balance while holding oneself upright – are a core component of bipolar disorder, as the study indicates, the researchers say it is possible that the motor abnormalities could appear before other symptoms, signaling an increased risk for the disorder.

It raises the question of whether therapies that improve motor symptoms may also help mood disorders, said Amanda R. Bolbecker, lead author of the study “Postural control in bipolar disorder: Increased sway area and decreased dynamical complexity,” published last week in the Public Library of Science ONE.
11.3. *I CAN’T POSITION MY BODY*

I included the last two short paragraphs so that the scientists who did the study and the writers at the *Science Daily* website not be blamed for a couple of claims I’ll be making. After all, there is greater uncertainty in this case as to whether there is a simple cause-and-effect relationship. That’s a signal to be cautious in drawing conclusions, but I’ll move forward anyway because my goal isn’t to ‘explain’ bipolar disorder but rather to support my claim that we are physical creatures which form complex networks of relationships even with our own bodies.

There might be an experiment that will induce temporary bipolar symptoms (not necessarily all of them) in a human being without that disorder being present. Perhaps a scientist could burden volunteers with something that will leave them fighting constantly to orient their bodies properly, maybe putting weights on one side of the body or putting a brace on the lower back. Maybe it could be done by way of glasses that make it difficult to keep a proper posture or even by a buzzing sound that induces vertigo.

If a man or woman, boy or girl, has a body that won’t hold a proper posture, would we expect them to have healthy attitudes? Wouldn’t they be more or less constantly tired, just as if they were suffering constant stomach problems? They’re responding to a world that’s not quite oriented properly, even if it’s their own bodies that are actually mis-positioned. They respond but the world’s not quite positioned right when they reach out to grab something or even to move toward a loved one. And finally do the pressures build up and Lord Byron, who had a club-foot which would have disrupted his posture, is writing poetry at a frantic pace.

But, his case is complicated by the regularity of the depression and the headaches which came on as winter approached and also by the schizophrenic condition of some relatives on his father’s side and the known genetic tendency of the males of his mother’s clan – the Gordons of the Scottish highlands – to bipolar behavior. A human being is a complicated story even in his clinically diagnosed problems – which may involve relationships not easily investigated or even noticed by the clinician.
CHAPTER 11. UNDERSTANDING MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL ILLNESSES

11.4 I seem to be in a story, but it’s all blooming, buzzing confusion.

What of schizophrenia? Let me first refer the reader to a multi-disciplinary discussion of two parallel phenomena, modern styles of thinking and art on the one hand and schizophrenia on the other hand: *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* [9] by Louis Sass, a clinical psychologist who is also quite knowledgeable in the fields of literature and art and history and more.

We modern human beings are all schizophrenics, in a manner of speaking, though most of us have lost contact with reality in its wider and more abstract respects, including its narrative aspects in this world, without being aware that something’s wrong. See *My Ends are Mad and Now I’m Also Stupid* at <http://loydfueston.com/?p=51> for a discussion of the fears of Melville and other great thinkers of the 1800s that Americans are morally insane, in rebellion against a world that doesn’t quite meet with our approval – though most are in a cowardly sort of rebellion.

I could restate my major goal in my philosophical and theological work in this way: I’m trying to restore sanity to modern human beings, especially Christians, by turning their attention to God’s Creation and by teaching them they should be responding to God’s Creation, actively responding to reality and not to some self-serving understanding of reality. But let me turn to a discussion of schizophrenia as a specific clinical disease with a group of symptoms which leave the patient in a terrible state, though sometimes with a self-awareness of his or her state of absolute mess and sometimes even a humorous appreciation of the ‘craziness’ of his delusions.

If we read Professor Sass’ book and pay attention to the stories told by some of the more interesting cases, we learn of someone who was apparently insane in an obvious way though given to a certain poetical way of speech (the daughter of James Joyce), and we learn of someone who has a grand understanding of the cosmos in which he is some sort of central figure wired to each part of this universe and controlled by all those parts – or maybe he controls the universe, and we get more general summaries of those who simply construct nonsensical narratives to make sense of their lives.

The other point I’d like to raise from *Madness and Modernism* [9] is the possibility, perhaps likelihood, that schizophrenia, as currently defined, developed in the industrial age, but I’d also like to note a seemingly conflicting
claim by Julian Jaynes that ancient man was schizophrenic and experienced life as a narrative guided by voices in his head. (See the wikipedia article on Professor Jaynes, at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_Jaynes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_Jaynes) for a discussion that seems pretty good to me and remember that Professor Jaynes is speaking about an age when human beings were being forced to live in radically new ways as human communities grew in size and complexity. This implies to me that schizophrenia is a disorder found in those who have little ability to respond to complex social patterns. Those human beings are depending upon rigidly practiced habits learned from their communities. When those learned habits are inadequate during periods of rapid change – schizophrenia becomes common.) Professor Jaynes didn’t put it in narrative terms, to my recollection of reading his major work on the subject 20 years ago, but it was clear the voices provided purpose and moral guidance – they were perceived as gods such as the ones which were some sort of manifest idealizations of human emotions and virtues in the *Iliad*. In fact, Jaynes thought the voices would appear as volition, the decision-maker for befuddled creatures which had not yet learned to integrate higher self-awareness and various sorts of abstract reasoning into their ‘core selves’ (my term).

We respond to what lies inside of us and outside of us by trying to create a narrative of our own lives and, usually, at least an implicit narrative that corresponds to what I call a ‘world’, an entity which – in my highly abstract way of thought – is unified, coherent, and complete. It is the universe, or some part of it, brought to moral order.

If the process of creating these narratives fails? It would certainly be plausible to get the sort of confusion and disturbance we read about in the *Iliad* or in the analyses of the American separation from reality we find in the writings of Tocqueville, Hawthorne, Melville, Henry James, Sr., and more recently Flannery O’Connor, Ray Bradbury, and Graham Greene (in at least the one novel – *The Quiet American*. But it seems to be a regularly recurring element, if often in the background, of serious American fiction or serious fiction containing American characters. It can certainly be found in my novels, most especially in the freely downloadable novel, *A Man For Every Purpose* available at [http://loydfueston.com/downloads/aman.pdf](http://loydfueston.com/downloads/aman.pdf) in which a man fragments in his efforts to make sense of conflicting demands upon him.
11.5 Conclusion

We shape ourselves in how we respond to our own bodies and to what lies outside of our selves. Most of all, when we speak of final purposes, we shape ourselves in how we respond to our Maker, or refuse to respond to Him.

When something goes wrong, we should remember that there is no isolated human soul or mind or consciousness which is diseased or disturbed but rather a system, in a manner of speaking, which is an organism failing to shape itself in an appropriate manner as it responds or fails to respond to its own bodily parts and to what lies outside of it. What’s wrong probably can’t be located in any one entity but rather in the relationships which the organism is failing to properly establish.
12 Your Mind Is What It Thinks It Is

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, Acts of Being, found at http://loydfueston.com/?p=1057. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/10/03.]

We shape our minds by active responses to our immediate environments and maybe to greater realms of Creation. Even without active responses, something like a flabby mind takes shape. The flabby mind of a modern man is invincibly ignorant in the sense that it’s shaped to what’s pushed into it by the public school system and the mainstream media, including our movies and popular books. This mainstream view, at least in the United States, serves the purpose of avoiding true thought, especially that which might resemble moral contemplation. It’s pseudo-knowledge feeding into spastic thought and it presents more of the appearance of a mind than the reality. It’s not quite the reality of a mind because it’s shaped to a distorted version of reality, not a reality directly perceived and not one mediated by reliable witnesses and teachers but rather a pseudo-reality which is constructed for a certain sort of public consensus.

It’s the formation of a consensus, of a herd-like mind, which has always been important to the American citizenry as we know from the early testimony of reliable witnesses and commentators of the quality of Tocqueville and Hawthorne and Melville moving through Mark Twain and on to Ray Bradbury and Hannah Arendt and other thinkers linked by their insight into the modern moral character.

The American citizenry did this to their collective self and their individual selves and then various sorts of predatory or exploitive men took advantage of this herd of creatures with mutilated moral characters and minds. The exploiters hijacked the process and began to direct the herd-
thought and herd-memory, the herd’s understanding of history and of the world in general, towards purposes of their own, though their efforts and their visions of a desired herdview were probably not well-focused and not always consistent between the different groups of exploiters. This is to say that the American exploitive class doesn’t really seem to think more effectively than the common members of the herd, though some in the exploitive class are clearheaded enough to run complex criminal conspiracies. A J.P. Morgan or a Lyndon Johnson can certainly see a well-defined opportunity and can map out a path to reach that opportunity with all due brutality.

But let’s return to discussion of the state of the minds of individual members of the herd. A passive body has flabby muscles and a passive brain has a flabby mind.

What can lead us to be passive rather than active in shaping our minds? Why would we accept a filtered and agenda-laden view of our environments and respond to that rather than to reality? We could guess that some behave in such a passive way because they believe that their minds as they currently exist are what they inherently are, are what they must be, are all they can be. That isn’t likely to be the whole answer, but it might be a good part of a more complete answer.

Sure enough, there is an article, *How Your Brain Reacts to Mistakes Depends On Your Mindset* found at [http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/09/110930153048.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/09/110930153048.htm), which deals with a study that shows that human beings who have this fatalistic view of their own minds don’t learn well from their mistakes.

We should try to shape our minds as well as possible, shaping them with active responses to valid perceptions of what lies around us, including such things as an understanding of history derived from books, maybe even movies, that give us some information about the social attitudes in Boston during the Colonial Period or the political behaviors of good and virtuous popes who found themselves embedded in webs of deceit and thievery, or the types of men who seek careers in powerful and centralized governments – especially those with the moral characters of gangsters according to Lord Acton, the 19th century historian.

Yet, we should remember that the Bible, and much else that testifies to the nature of human beings, testify that some of us are shepherds and some are sheep. We can speak of those who fill an official spot in a hierarchy as being shepherds and often they do fill an important role just by going through rote behavior even if they aren’t active enough to be true shepherds.
Then there are those who are more natural in the role of being shepherds or at least of being sheep willing to go ahead of the flock to check out new pastures.

We need shepherds, and leader sheep, to teach the sheep to be better than what the power-elite wish them to be. First of all, the sheep in the main part of the flock need to be told they’re being shaped to the desires of their would-be butchers. Then they can be told that they can do better. Finally, they can be taught about better pastures around them and maybe even be taught how to explore new regions.

Most of all, we all need to learn that we’re going to be resurrected to share the life of the Shepherd, Jesus Christ, not to be bleating sheep for time without end. We all need to shape ourselves to the goal of being shepherds in at least some ways, most especially, in choosing to be active in our responses to what lies around us, to what was created by God. In this way, we actively respond to God Himself.
13 There is Experience and Then There is Experience

[The original version of this essay was published on the blog-site, Acts of Being, found at http://loydfueston.com/?p=1069. It was finished and uploaded on 2011/10/11.]

There is an important point raised by the research discussed in this article, We Are What We Experience found at http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/10/111005170725.htm. I’ll quote a good part of this short article because of its importance, though I don’t know anything about the quality of the underlying article:

Our life experiences – the ups and downs, and everything in between – shape us, stay with us and influence our emotional set point as adults, according to a new study led by Virginia Commonwealth University researchers. The study suggests that, in addition to our genes, our life experiences are important influences on our levels of anxiety and depression.

“In this time of emphasis on genes for this and that trait, it is important to remember that our environmental experiences also make important contributions to who we are as people,” said principal investigator Kenneth Kendler, M.D., director of the VCU Virginia Institute for Psychiatric and Behavioral Genetics.

Kendler, professor of psychiatry, and human and molecular genetics in the VCU School of Medicine, and an international team of researchers from VCU and other universities, analyzed nine data sets of more than 12,000 identical twins with symptoms of depression and/or anxiety through the lifespan.

...
According to Kendler, statistical models, developed by his colleague Charles Gardner, Ph.D., a research associate in the VCU Department of Psychiatry, were used to observe how components of individual variation changed over time. The team observed that as the twins moved from childhood into late adult life, they increasingly diverged in their predicted levels of symptoms, but after that point, stopped further diverging. Further, they noted that environmental experiences contribute substantially to stable and predictable inter-individual differences in levels of anxiety and depression by mid-life in adults.

There are undoubtedly some genetic problems, as well as some types of physical damage, so constraining as to nearly predetermine a bad outcome for the victims. Most genetic conditions, whether directly problems or conducive to developing problems, should better be regarded as constraints on a human organism which shapes itself as it responds to its environment, becoming something flabby and lacking in moral order if it responds reluctantly and weakly – responds passively in a manner of speaking. Kenneth Minogue once said, “There’s a lot of ruin in a country,” and I could say in a similar way that there is a lot of ruin in a human being, that is, a human being can be very badly damaged and still have a lot of potential for rich and good developments of various sorts. When I speak of good in this context, I mean good that is active, that leads to objectively good results in the communities of that damaged human being. Those good results might be vague or even doubtful as are the good results of many of our human actions, but intelligent analysis will typically let us know when the actions of a human being have truly tended to the good.

I confess: I’m one of those men that Adam Smith had feared would develop in the prosperous, commercial societies he was seeing arise and was glorifying in many ways. I’m genial – but capable of impolite behavior when my self-respect or moral beliefs are irritated. I’m also a bit short on the toughness necessary for a true moral character – but I’m toughening up enough that I’m at least willing to force moral decisions on my part by painting myself into corners. I don’t think I’m naturally one of these hollow-chested men, as we modern men were labeled by C.S. Lewis. In many ways, I’m a bit like the tough and gruff – but self-sacrificing – Scotsmen from the older generations in my mother’s family. I also have the sort of perseverance found in my father’s family where many of the men gave themselves, as
many men did, to work such as lead-mining for the good of their families knowing they would earn better incomes than most workers and would end their lives relatively early as they struggled for each breath. That perseverance is a form of courage though a bit different than the impulsive courage found in adventurers and warriors. Despite a good inheritance of potentially tough moral character, I was shaped to be a consumer of what was offered by the modern corporations and governments rather than a man trying to choose a good life and making do with what could be honestly gained in that particular life. As Wendell Berry said somewhere, frugality isn’t about saving money, it’s about self-respect. It’s also not about living poorly for the sake of being poor, it’s about living a balanced life which can accept some luxurious goods when they can be a part of a morally well-ordered life.

Clearly, I’ve formed an idea of a good life, though the details would still have to be set according to particular opportunities and problems which I’ll be confronting in the years left to me in this mortal realm. It’s just as clear that I live in a certain environment: I live in a state of well-fed poverty in my sister’s house in a small-town in New England. This small-town, indeed much of the modern West, is populated by men and women and even children convinced the Constitution, or perhaps the Bible, says their invincibly ignorant opinions are as good as the opinions of one who at least tries to get some background knowledge and then to form his ways of thought according to the works of the acknowledged great thinkers of the West. Modern men have a right to their opinions but no responsibility to find out anything about the objects of those opinions. In the context of this discussion, this is a problem because those modern men are responding to a false understanding of their environments or the environments of those in, say, Afghanistan. Modern men are mostly responding to a dream-world bearing only a superficial resemblance to reality.

When genial Americans, as one good example, respond to a world in which they can think of themselves as virtuous because they pay their taxes and keep a nice-looking lawn, then they are able to put off any confrontations with reality. They live in an American television series, a plastic world but one apparently desirable to those whose fears outweigh any desires they might have for freedom beyond that of watching dirty movies or choosing from a vast array of brands of toothpaste.

We shape ourselves by our experiences but those experiences aren’t entirely objective. They are always experiences lived in our understanding
of reality and that understanding, at its best, is being enriched and made more complete as man learns more about himself and his world. Some of us might hope to make our experiences as objective as we can by responding to the world as it corresponds to the best understanding available to us. Others seem not to even realize that we are creatures set in particular contexts. Perhaps some realize this to be true but willfully act as if a context is what we believe it to be based upon false information pushed into us by public schools and television shows and advertisements and so forth.
Appendices
Appendices
Other Writings by Loyd Fueston

Why Speak of Other Writings?

My work is of a whole though I’ve been told that my writing style, at least for fiction, changes a lot to fit the story I’m telling. I think I tend to write theological and metaphysical works, and the occasional political piece, in the style of a novelistic philosopher — such as Plato or Nietzsche. I also write novels in the style of a philosophical novelist, such as Melville, or a theological novelist, such as Flannery O’Connor. Those novels are an integral part of the development of my worldview, my understanding of the Creator and His Creation, including that unique part of Creation — man.

Nonfiction Books

In 2006, my first published book appeared due to the kindly intervention of the theologian Stanley Hauerwas and the generosity of Jon Stock at *Wipf & Stock*, a republisher of Christian works of merit and a first publisher of works marketed in the academic community. That book was *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* as described at [http://loydfueston.com/?page_id=17](http://loydfueston.com/?page_id=17). Only a paltry number of copies have been sold. A follow-up book about struggling through a difficult period, *The Peace of Christ* as described at [http://loydfueston.com/?page_id=89](http://loydfueston.com/?page_id=89) did no better.

I set out on a different path and published my next book, *Four Kinds of Knowledge*, on the Internet intending to allow personal use though I reserved derivative rights, first under my own — perhaps unenforceable — wording and then under a Creative Commons license. This book is available
for downloading at http://loydfueston/downloads/know.pdf


In 2011, I typeset and published as a pdf file a majority of my blog entries from both To See a World in a Grain of Sand at http://loydf.wordpress.com/ and Acts of Being at http://loydfueston.com/ and this year I updated that ebook. Acts of Being: Selected Weblog Writings From 2006 to 2011 is downloadable at http://loydfueston.com/downloads/acts.pdf This book is part of a set of samplers of essays from that collection. The goal is to produce books which are more focused and much smaller. I am myself sometimes intimidated by the sheer volume of writings I’ve produced. Below, I list the samplers published to date:


Novels

Consistent with my view of the unity of human knowledge, at least true knowledge, I consider my fictions to be part of the same effort as my non-fictions. As a possible aid to the reader, I’ll simply mention that I’ve made four novels available for free download under a Creative Commons non-derivatives license:

• Corporate Sex at http://loydfueston.com/downloads/corpsex.pdf

• A Man for Every Purpose at http://loydfueston.com/downloads/aman.pdf

• The Hermit of Turkey Hill at http://loydfueston.com/downloads/hermit.pdf
OTHER WRITINGS TO COME


Other Writings to Come

I’m back to working, sporadically but seriously, on several novels and one short story. I’m also planning to put some additional writings from the blog, *To See a World in a Grain of Sand* at [http://loydf.wordpress.com/](http://loydf.wordpress.com/) in book form(s). In particular, I wrote some Lenten meditations which I consider to have some worth. The intent was to write meditations in a spirit of peace with modern empirical knowledge rather than ‘spiritual’ meditations with pre-modern understandings of the world. I don’t know if I succeeded but I plan, God willing, on getting back to organizing them into book form.

I’ve also done a substantial amount of work on books where I think I might be able to add newer insights on specific topics, such as the nature of the human mind – tentatively named *The Human Mind as Re-Creation*. Others are partially written or scoped out or have appeared in my dreams.

My major desire is to return to completing some of the fragments of novels stored on my computer and to write new novels. I’m also returning to some experiments with the short-story form. All my earlier, 1990ish, short stories have been disappeared and I’m not sure myself if that was all done purposely or sometimes by accident.

In my opinion, we can’t move forward in developing better and richer understandings of God in His role as Creator, of His manifested thoughts (Creation), or man until we have a body of words and concepts which are drawn from current understandings of Creation as we can perceive and explore it. Those understandings would have to then be developed in a more or less freely creative style into a narrative which is an image of God’s story which is this world. Homer and the great lyric poets of ancient Greece are said to have blazed the paths followed by the ancient Greek scientists and philosophers. We also need poets and novelists to do this sort of work though I suspect they would nowadays have to follow Einstein and Darwin, if only to catch up.
Bibliography


Colophon

This book was typeset using the LaTeX typesetting system created by Leslie Lamport and the memoir class written by Peter Wilson. The LaTeX typesetting system is a set of macro commands using the TeX typesetting system written by Donald Knuth. The body text is set 10/12pt on a 33pc measure with Computer Modern Roman designed by Donald Knuth. Other fonts include Sans, Smallcaps, Italic, Slanted and Typewriter, all from Knuth’s Computer Modern family.